



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

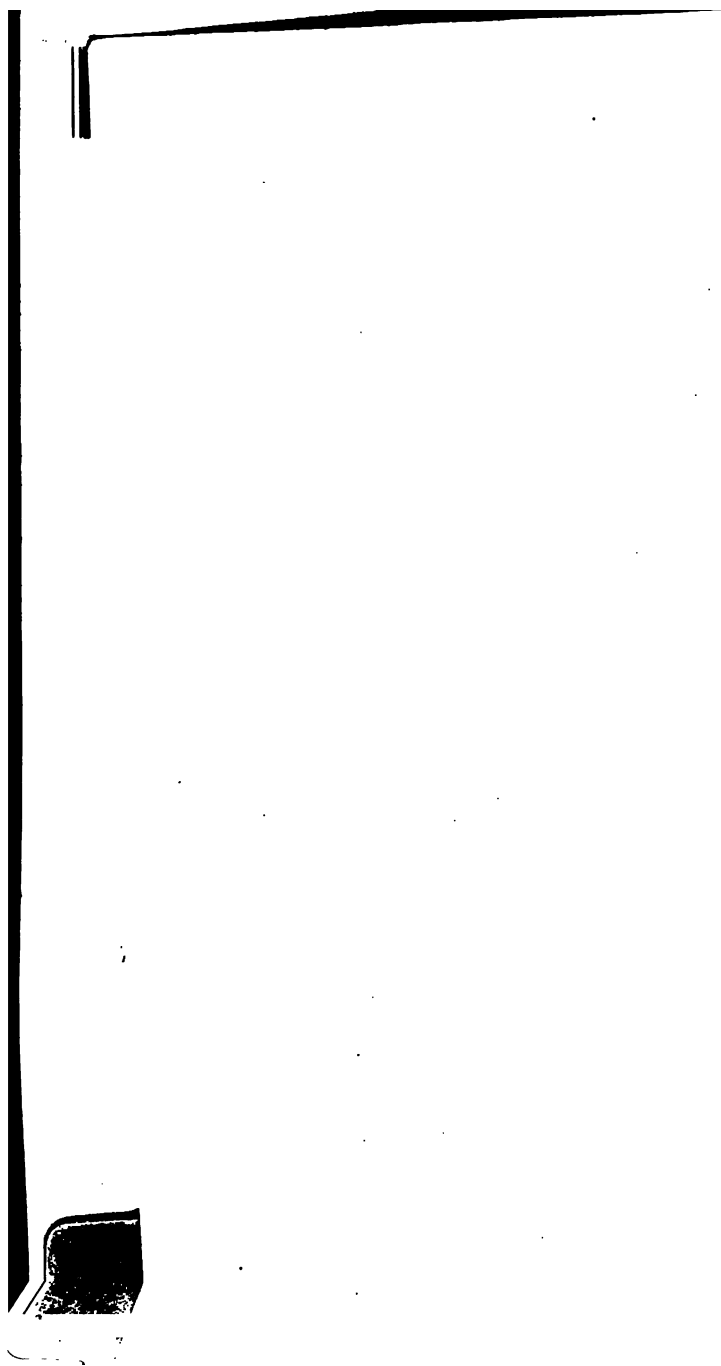
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NOT
A
HEROINE
in
the
Boudoir



600065011J



NOT A HEROINE.

"Wait, and Love himself will bring
The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
Of wisdom. Wait: my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

**PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY
EDINBURGH AND LONDON**

NOT A HEROINE.

A Novel.

BY

MRS BROOKFIELD,

AUTHOR OF "INFLUENCE," "ONLY GEORGE," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.

1873.

[All rights reserved.]

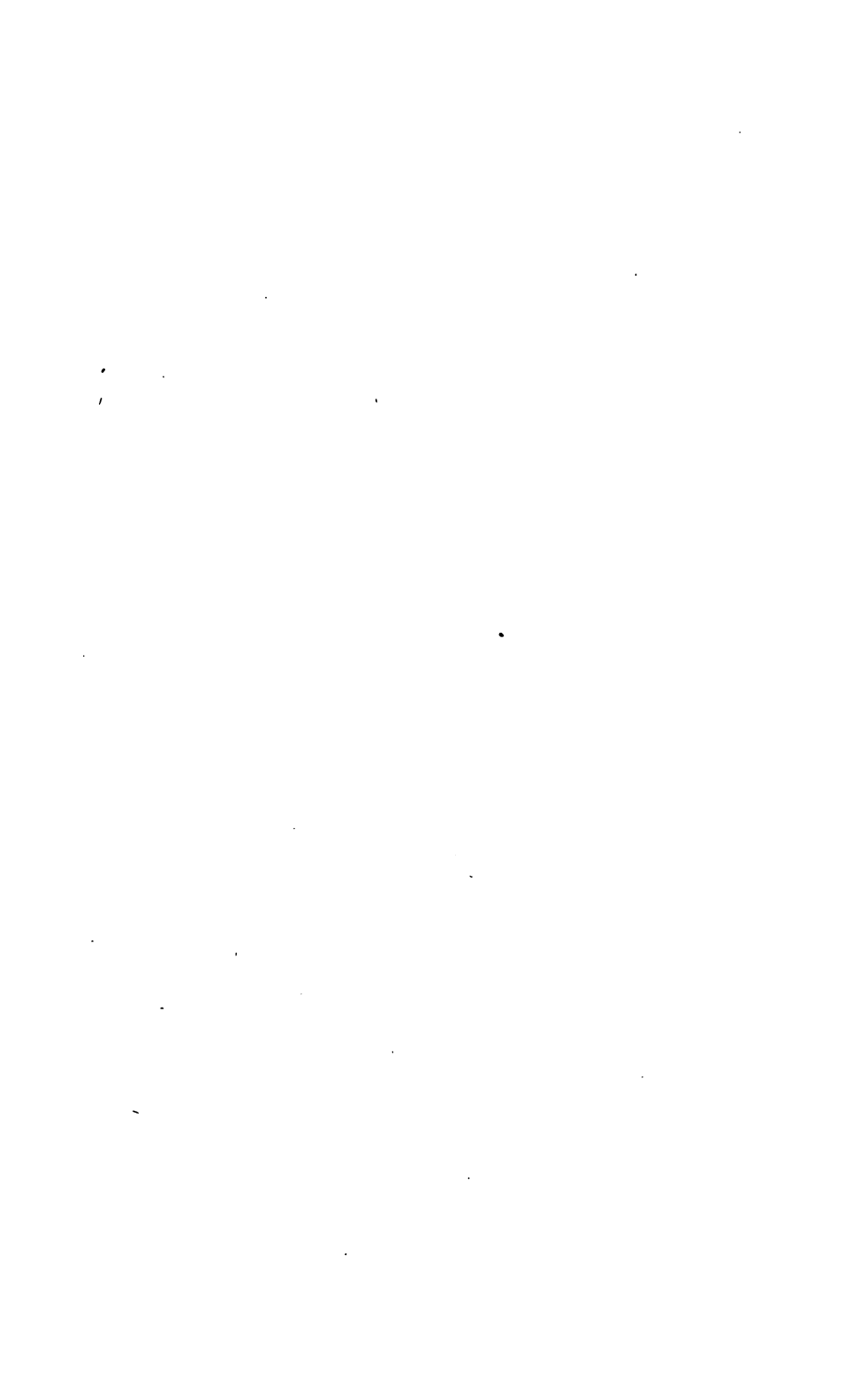
251. b. 9.



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. CLIMBING TOWARDS THE LIGHT	1
II. READY FOR BATTLE	19
III. BEAUTIFUL DANCING	34
IV. THE PASSION FLOWER	59
V. AUTUMN DAYS	74
VI. DIEU DISPOSE	87
VII. NO LETTERS	100
VIII. CAN THE ROCK SPEAK ?	110
IX. ESPRIT DE CORPS	128
X. TRY AND FORGET	145
XI. A MAN OF SENSIBILITY	158
XII. BEWARE !	175
XIII. MONTAGU SQUARE	193
XIV. A NEW FACE	216
XV. AGREEABLE PEOPLE	227
XVI. A DANGEROUS PATH	244
XVII. PARTED	255
XVIII. DEATH IN LIFE	274
XIX. A KNIGHT-ERRANT	287



NOT A HEROINE.

CHAPTER I.

CLIMBING TOWARDS THE LIGHT.

THERE is a favourite theory amongst benevolent people, that the misfortunes and miseries of human life are more evenly divided than we are prone to admit when we are ourselves the sufferers. ‘Was ever man so wronged?’ we cry; ‘was ever woman so ill-used before?’—and all the while, in our next-door neighbour there may be a silent, patient, fellow-sufferer, whose cross may be as heavy a burden to him, though the world may never know of it. Perhaps the law of compensation

bears a larger share in our lives than we can see or admit in the heat of the battle. Quietly looking back upon it, we can say, 'If it had not been for this friend—for that kind word—for such a change of circumstances, I could never have lived through that dreadful time!' Perhaps, if we have been cut off from all human sympathy, the 'peace which passeth all understanding' has alighted upon us, and embraced us with its healing wings. Perhaps we learn to adapt ourselves to our pain, and to improve under its discipline, as a plant which is dwarfed may develop a denser foliage. But we may have to pass through many fluctuations before amendment or consolation comes. A creeper hindered in its natural growth will find for itself some unexpected outlet, through which it will climb towards the light in spite of every obstacle; it strives to fulfil the law of its being, which claims the sunshine to give life

and colour to its petals, and firmness to its tender shoots. It may traverse crooked paths in its impeded course ; it may even take its way through some dark cellar, where it is warped and perverted in its growth, and its flowers and leaves become pale and withered up for want of light. Here it may lose all vitality and die ; but if its roots are good, it will survive—and finding an escape from this dark passage, it will henceforth develop unlooked-for vigour and beauty in its persistent course. Each new impediment that shall be thrown in its way will only bring forth more surprising and graceful adaptations to these new circumstances, and serve but to confirm the stability of its growth.

There is a fine old Elizabethan hall in the west of England belonging to the Wrexmore family, which, for more than twenty years, had been the scene of almost unbroken happi-

ness and prosperity. A time arrived, however, when a bystander might say that the inmates of that house had been singled out, like Job himself, to be tested and purified by the fire of adversity. Their misfortunes fell upon them so suddenly, and appeared to be followed up so persistently, and with so many and ever-expanding complications, that the friends who knew their heavy trials could scarcely realise that a time had been, not long ago, when happy children's voices echoed through those old corridors, and music and dancing and laughter were not unknown at Wrexmore Hall.

An honoured father and mother graciously presided there, over pleasant gatherings of friends and acquaintances. The people around were loyal and frank in their homage to Lord and Lady Wrexmore. No churlish voice was raised in envy against them. From the highest to the lowest, every one received his due in

that well-ordered family. The poor and the suffering were not forgotten. The estate was steadily improved. The farmers themselves could find no cause of complaint against so just and courteous a landlord as Lord Wrexmore.

Four children had grown up—amiable, well principled, and good-looking.

The two elder daughters married early without let or hindrance—the eldest, an Honourable Mr Brabazon, with a large property in Ireland ; the second, an elderly Lord Porchester, both of them gentlemen of good position in their own class of life. Lord Wrexmore's only son, Edmund Irving, was at this time twenty-three. He had only lately left college, but he had already engaged himself to marry Marion Aylmer, the daughter of a very old friend of his father's. She was an exceedingly clever and agreeable girl, rather older than himself, and with more strength of character. It

suiting his gentle disposition to rest on her. The only one of his family who felt disquieted by this engagement, was Edmund Irving's youngest sister, Catherine. She was two years younger than her brother, and was certainly the prettiest, the gentlest, and the most interesting of his sisters. She adored Edmund with all the best affection of her nature—and she saw that Marion Aylmer was worldly and calculating, although a pleasant woman.

It was an understood thing that Catherine would probably some day marry her cousin Lord Alwyn, an amiable and chivalrous young man, who had announced himself to be devoted to her, but he was not yet of age, and no engagement had been allowed between them. Catherine, however, was romantic, and she wove romantic associations around her cousin, and was glad to think that her fate

was early and happily decided for her. Meantime her brother's steadfast affection and companionship—the absolute sympathy which had grown up between them from their infancy, was enough to make her life bright and happy. She had been presented, and had spent two seasons in London, without for one instant faltering in her quiet preference for Lord Alwyn. A tacit understanding was allowed to exist between them, but he had pledged himself to say nothing to her as to the state of his feelings until he was of age, and until she had had time to see a little more of the world, and of other men.

Up to this time cynical strangers might have looked on and said of the Wrexmore family, 'All this unchequered happiness and prosperity is too good to last.' And the turning-point arrived at last. In the early spring of 1868, an attack of typhus fever

killed Lord Alwyn, whose last words were messages of love and tenderness to Catherine Irving. And almost at the same time, Edmund Irving betrayed unmistakable signs of disease of the lungs. Perhaps her beloved brother's illness, and the agony of anxiety which she felt on his account, almost counteracted the sincere distress which the death of Lord Alwyn had called forth. It was indeed a terrible blow to a young man of high promise, arrived only at the threshold of life, to be condemned to a wasting disease and an early death; and, worse than all to Edmund Irving, was the trial of breaking off his engagement with Marion Aylmer.

He could not ask her to marry a dying man, and the families on both sides decided that all must be at an end between them—all except friendship, an unsatisfactory exchange where love has been.

During this melancholy time, Catherine was Edmund's constant companion—his chosen friend and confidante. His betrothed had made no resistance, no opposition, to the sad dictum against her marriage. A few words of affectionate regret—a request that no farewell interview should be gone through—a hope that Edmund 'might yet live many, many years, and that they should meet again as friends some happier day,'—this was all that Marion wrote. But Edmund had not much time allowed him in which to lament and to ponder over her calm self-control. Lord Wrexmore had hitherto appeared to be one of the healthiest and most robust of men. He complained now and then of a twinge of gout, but no one took fright at the mention of so familiar and aristocratic an ailment. Only six weeks, however, after the doom of his only son had been pronounced, Lord

Wrexmore died suddenly. The familiar, well-accustomed gout had attacked his heart.

The end of the summer had now arrived. The gardens at Wrexmore Hall were in a blaze of beauty with geraniums and chrysanthemums of every hue. The smooth gravel paths, and the soft green terraces were daily swept clear of every falling leaf. But the leaves continued relentlessly to fall, and the cruel autumn winds were howling with cutting keenness around his old home; and young Lord Wrexmore had to take his first sad step as a recognised invalid, and to go abroad to find a milder climate for the winter. His mother was devoted to him, but grief at the loss of her husband, had brought on a partial paralysis of her limbs, which confined her to a sofa. Her mind, however, remained in its pristine state of enthusiastic vitality. 'I shall go abroad with

you, Edmund,' she said. 'Let us bear the burden and heat of the day together. By easy stages I can be moved from place to place without difficulty. Do not try to dissuade me, my dear—nothing will deter me from going with you—and Catherine will be our guardian angel, she will journey with us,' and with a faint shadow of a smile, Lady Wrexmore affectionately pressed her daughter's hand in hers, saying, 'I know, my dear child, you cannot be left behind. Your sisters, of course, would be delighted to keep you under their care in England. But do not be afraid ; I know your heart, my Catherine. You shall travel with us.'

An experienced doctor and his wife, Mr and Mrs Scudamore, had been lately engaged to live at Wrexmore Hall, to watch over the health of Lord Wrexmore and his mother. Their presence was a support and help to all the family ; they were particularly cheerful,

unaffected people, between thirty and forty, and accustomed to the usages of society. Mrs Scudamore wrote Lady Wrexmore's letters, managed her many charities, enjoyed the importance of her position, and was only a little too obliging and zealous in her anxiety to be of use. Her husband was a man of considerable ability in his profession, and under his careful supervision, Lady Wrexmore was taken abroad for the winter with her son and daughter. Her own malady showed little sign of amendment, but this she resolutely ignored. Her constant state of suffering was not to be taken into consideration for an instant in deciding where they were to live abroad: Lord Wrexmore's condition was the one absorbing occupation to them all. For his sake, his mother and sister were both ready to travel to the end of the world, and to sacrifice every other interest. He was not spoilt by

this devotion. One calm, straight line of duty went through all his actions. It was a severe trial to him to be obliged to lead an idle life, even though his disease appeared to be kept in abeyance by living in a genial air. He craved for the occupations and interests of his home, and earnestly desired to fulfil the duties of his position there, and to work while there was yet time.

At length, in the early summer, Wrexmore Hall was once more opened to receive the family, after many months' absence in foreign lands. During the old Lord Wrexmore's lifetime, a certain stately conventionality had pervaded all their proceedings. Since his death, health, religion, and affection decided everything.

To Catherine and her brother, the time spent abroad had passed swiftly, for youth is elastic and easily amused, and they had seen much to remember. Lovely scenery,

interesting towns full of traditions of the past, and the charm of novelty, had helped to bring some enjoyment to them. They had been frequently moving about, with no duties more pressing than to seek health and consolation for each other; the weight of their calamities was scarcely so fully realised as when they returned to their old home—where life for them, had opened with so much promise.

At twenty-four Lord Wrexmore knew that he could not expect to live many years longer; and instead of enjoying the vigour and activity of his youth, he was now driven into the invalid ways, the guarded prudent concern about his own symptoms and his own treatment, which, to his young ardent nature, was a most repulsive discipline. Lady Wrexmore's pure and lofty piety had early accepted the blow which had fallen upon herself. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord

has taken away,' she could repeat with the submission of an absolute faith. But to see her only son—the representative of his beloved father—so early doomed to die, called forth an anguish of daily and hourly prayer, which pervaded her whole being. She never thought of herself, of her paralysed condition, of her broken life ; her one absorbing anxiety was for her son. For her daughter Catherine she had always a ready sympathy, an earnest endeavour after cheerfulness in her presence, because it was indeed a sad home for a young girl. But Catherine was strong and well—better days might be in store for her—whilst for her brother there could be no better days. Only one gradual, though perhaps it might be a slow descent and decadence until the end.

Catherine Irving was of a highly sensitive organisation, susceptible, vibrating with sympathy and with wistful affection for those she

loved. Her clear, pale complexion, her soft dark eyes, and her expressive eyebrows, made her altogether, more decidedly interesting and pretty, than absolutely beautiful. Catherine's hair was like that of a medieval saint—of a golden brown, crisp and waving, and always picturesquely arranged. The grace and ease of her movements, and the distinction in her air, voice, and manner, were very attractive ; but perhaps her greatest charm at this time lay in her radiant smile, which contrasted vividly with the pathetic expression which had become almost habitual to her. From time to time an impulsive gaiety took possession of her, in spite of all the sadness by which she was surrounded. Her nature was gay and hopeful, and the misfortunes of her life during the last twelve months, wearied and depressed her, without calling forth any higher virtue than a passive endurance of what was inevit-

able. Every now and then, a fit of petulance and of rebellion would seize upon her, against which she fought by rushing into a fitful gaiety which her brother understood,—but which might have appeared unfeeling to those who did not know her well, and who knew only how much she had gone through.

But Catherine's nature was only too affectionate and too susceptible. Her fits of depression came upon her, more from sympathy with those she loved, than on her own account. For herself, she still hoped some happiness might yet spring up. Her undeclared preference for Lord Alwyn had not been much more than sisterly regard. She missed him greatly, and mourned his untimely death with tender regret; but she knew it was not likely she should never be sought or loved again—and in the midst of the anxiety and sadness which surrounded her, there was a dim

castle in the air in which she took refuge from time to time, when Lord Wrexmore was too busy to allow her to be with him, and her mother was otherwise occupied—a fairy palace, in which an ideal hero dwelt, who was to heal all poor Catherine's wounds, and to cherish her for ever, when that dread time arrived that her beloved brother would no longer remain amongst them.

If it were not for this imaginary future, Catherine could not have endured her present life with the unselfish sweetness which was part of her character. She was not very wise, she was not even very religious. To love and to be loved was her ideal of happiness. To be the first object of existence to at least one other human being, was the secret longing of her heart—

‘ There are who sigh that no fond heart is theirs,
None loves them best—O vain and selfish sigh !’

CHAPTER II.

READY FOR BATTLE.

AMONGST the few intimate old friends who appeared at Wrexmore, to welcome the return of the family from abroad, came Sir Philip Ogleby, a widower, with his daughter Lavinia. She was a clever energetic girl of twenty-seven, with considerable self-reliance, honesty, and originality. She was plain in features, and quaint in her dress, but she possessed good teeth and eyes, excellent health, and cheerful spirits, and she was a stanch friend. There was no repose where Lavinia was. She was strong in her contempt of conventionality, and delighted in argument, opposition — almost wrangling — with her friends, although she

would go through fire and water to serve them at any moment. She plunged into discussion directly she came into the house, and suggested plans of action for each member of the family. Catherine had always appeared to her a poor, weak, amiable creature who needed stirring up, and she attacked her as usual, even whilst she was taking off her bonnet, immediately on her arrival. Miss Irving had taken her up to her room, and Lavinia at once began—‘You have had a long idle time, Catherine; I hope you are not drifting along without any definite pursuit. What object in life do you set before you?’

Catherine laughed at first, but then she answered rather plaintively, ‘I can’t make plans of action like you, Lavinia. There is always a great deal too much to do, it seems to me—a great deal more than I like, at all events—without struggling to look for it, as you always think

one ought to do. It is not natural to me to take life as solemnly as you do. Though I am sure I have had enough to sober my expectations. I confess I long more than anything else to be happy, and to see all the other people who belong to me, and whom I love,—happy also. You don't know what it is to have had everything you most cared about broken up, and everybody who remains alive, ill and miserable.'

'I have not gone through the same ordeal,' Lavinia replied, 'but I can understand what it is. I feel sorry for you, but more for your brother himself; and you should do the same. Throw yourself into his life—try to help him, make him happy if you can—but give up that fatal pursuit, your own happiness.'

'Pursuit!'

Catherine answered sadly. 'Do you think I ever expect it again? I said I longed to be happy, not that I tried for it. I long for something pleasant to happen, some-

thing new, instead of always the same anxiety, the same miserable recollections, the same suffering for those I love best in the world, which I can do nothing to relieve. I have 'not the same identity that I had a year ago, I am literally not the same person ; and I am sure I feel twenty years older.'

'Very natural, but quite wrong,' Lavinia replied. 'You are absolutely undisciplined, my dear ; and if you don't take care, you will have some more trouble yet, to bring you to a better mind.'

'Oh ! don't threaten me like that,' Catherine cried. 'You are like a Methodist preacher, holding up a picture of special judgments for special sins. It is quite natural at my age to wish to be happy. I try to bear what I have to bear, as patiently as I can, but I hope—I do hope with all my heart—this state of things is not to go on for ever.'

‘It will go on most likely as long as you need it. From a utilitarian point of view, I should therefore recommend you to accept it without any more rebellious struggling against it. Accept it—and then, perhaps, better days may come.’

Catherine always winced under Lavinia’s unsympathising dogmatism, as it appeared to her—she was in fact easily bored; and without pursuing the subject, she asked—

‘Shall we go downstairs?’

‘I am quite ready,’ Lavinia answered gruffly.

‘Don’t you want to comb your hair?’ asked Catherine good-naturedly.

‘Is it rough? Never mind! I don’t go in for beauty.’

‘There is some warm water here,’ Catherine added kindly, anxious to see Lavinia, if possible, look clean and tidy.

‘No—thanks,’ she replied. ‘I believe I never

took my gloves off during all the journey, my hands, therefore, cannot want washing. It would be mere waste of time and waste of labour to remain upstairs any longer to wash hands which are not dirty.'

And therefore Lavinia took her place in the drawing-room, rough and crumpled as she was, and drank her tea out of an exquisite eggshell-china cup, resting—not unwillingly—in a luxurious pale-blue damask arm-chair, by which her coarse serge suit was thrown into strong relief. She stretched out her small, well-shaped feet, disguised as they were in heavy, clump-soled, rough-looking boots, and pulling towards her an embroidered footstool, she entirely monopolised the conversation for three-quarters of an hour.

If Lavinia's good deeds could be known, the many defects in her dress and outward appearance would have been more readily

forgiven. Her boots were ill-shaped, but they had been made by a poor shoemaker out of work, whom she had employed from charity. Her dress was coarse, because she spent her money in helping others. She ignored the duty of making herself an agreeable object as a member of society. On the whole, she was an acquisition in this depressed household. Her blunt ways were always excused by her old friends, for the sake of her honesty, and because they well knew that she had a good heart. But after all, this is not enough. It is true she had warm feelings, but she wanted tact and she wanted sympathy. The well-trained Mrs Scudamore shuddered, as she heard Lavinia discussing medical education for women, with her husband,—and questioning him firmly, as to his sensations on entering a dissecting-room for the first time. Upon this, even the easy-going Sir

Philip Ogleby interposed, saying, 'My dear child, I can allow you to attend Female Suffrage meetings and education lectures to any extent, but I shall certainly draw the line if you take to dissection, and so will your brother Paul—of that I am quite sure—it's nasty, I assure you it is.'

'I am not such a fool as to intend to do anything of the kind,' Lavinia answered. 'It happens not to be my vocation; but as I have the privilege of knowing more than one member of Mr Scudamore's profession who happen to be women, I should like, as a mere outsider, to know how they have got over those difficulties which appear to me the most trying, in their most honourable career.'

Here Lord Wrexmore came into the room, and Lavinia's whole aspect changed. She had for him a weak point in her usually well-armed

nature. As he shook hands with her, with that air of refinement and polished ease which had always distinguished him,—enhanced by the delicacy of illness, the contrast of her own uncouth appearance for an instant painfully crossed her mind. She regretted, as a passing thought, that she had neither smoothed her hair nor washed her face since her journey, and felt glad that the light was subdued in the long, old-fashioned gallery where they were sitting. They were surrounded by portraits of former Lord Wrexmores and their wives and daughters, all bearing the same family trace of gentle nurture.

Lord Wrexmore respected Lavinia a good deal, and perhaps rated her abilities even higher than they deserved, from an unacknowledged consciousness of her very great regard and appreciation for himself. He looked sincerely glad to see her, greeted her most

cordially, and at once sat down beside her. Lavinia's clumsy boots hastily retreated from the Persian footstool, and were hidden under her chair. She was a woman still, though she tried so hard to soar far above all the weaknesses of her sex. After a little conversation of a more general kind, Lord Wrexmore turned to Lavinia, and said with a smile, 'I am sure you wish to ask me what I am doing to benefit my fellow-creatures? Let me at once give you the satisfaction of knowing that I have set up a hobby, and that it engrosses me a good deal at present.'

'Let me hear what it is,' Lavinia answered, immediately beaming with interest. 'I approve of hobbies, as you know.'

'I am Quixotic enough to think that I may help to raise the condition of the labourers, at all events, on my own estate; and if I succeed in any degree, the same thing will be done else-

where—it will spread,’ and Lord Wrexmore’s dark, earnest eyes glowed with enthusiasm.

‘Tell me your plans. Gallons of soup, piles of blankets, Lady Bountifuls, and pauperisation?’ asked Lavinia with her usual want of perception as to another’s train of thought.

‘No,’ Lord Wrexmore replied, but in a tone of more reserve than before. ‘I am not quite so hackneyed in my schemes as you would imply. The soup and the blankets will go on as long as my dear mother has any voice in such things, and I doubt if I should ever have the heart to stop the supply. It comes to our people here as naturally as the air they breathe to ask us for what they want, and they receive it from this house, without any sense of demoralisation. It is a part of the old feudal system, which lingers still amongst us. My present scheme has no originality, but it has been tried elsewhere with success, and I have

set my heart on establishing it at Wrexmore. It is only that land allotments shall form part of the lease of every cottage on the estate. To allow every labourer, at all events, not less than half an acre of land to cultivate for his own profit. Those who have large families might take one or two acres into cultivation—paying rent for it of course, so as to keep up the sense of their own independence. I am trying to get my plans in order before I leave England for the winter, and my agent, Brand, is very zealous and anxious to carry out my wishes, though he is not so sanguine as to the result as I am.'

'One objection to *la petite culture*,' answered Lavinia, 'is that the men will find it pay to work only for themselves—and your farmers will get no labourers to work for them.'

'Oh, no! I provide against this, first, by making the allotments too small to tempt the

men into second-rate farming. Good farming, by which I mean what is really profitable, requires more capital than they can hope to obtain. But, in the second place, the allotments are distinctly made to day-labourers as such. If a man takes a fancy to give up day-labour, except on his own account, he must give up also that cottage with its land allotment, which I assigned to him as a day-labourer. I might take him as a tenant on another footing—just as I might let you three acres of land to-morrow, if you could prove to me that you had the means to cultivate it to its best advantage. But without good proof that you would be able to do justice to the land, I should not be acting fairly towards my successors, if I let it to you with the risk that it would be mismanaged and degenerate for want of proper treatment. This requires capital.’

‘I can manage people well enough,’ Lavinia answered. ‘But I doubt if I could man-

age land. It is not a sufficiently animated pursuit for me. There is the dead time of the year, at which I should champ like a horse at his bit. I want a more stirring occupation. When are the Aylmers coming here?’

Lord Wrexmore was surprised, and answered rather stiffly, ‘I really do not know.’

‘Marion told me she thought of proposing a visit here soon,” pursued Lavinia.

‘I had not heard of it,’ said Lord Wrexmore, his voice trembling with emotion; and in another minute he had left the room, and joined Lady Wrexmore in her private sitting-room, where she lay as usual, serene and patient, on her couch of patient suffering.

‘Dearest mother,’ Edmund said, as he sat down beside her, ‘Lavinia Ogleby, in her blunt way, has just now asked me when the Aylmers are coming here. Is there any plan of this kind? Is it possible that Marion has suggested it?’

‘Yes, Edmund,’ said his mother, and she clasped his hand in hers,—‘she has proposed it. I heard from her this morning.’

‘And you did not tell me!’

‘I waited for a quiet moment. Here is Marion’s letter, my child—read it, and tell me what your wishes are; they shall be carried out, dearest Edmund, be they what they may. Much as I dread all fresh excitement for you, my beloved son, you know you may rely upon your mother. Your wishes are mine. Indeed, no other aim in life remains to me now but to promote your welfare.’

‘And Catherine’s,’ Edmund added, in a tone of gentle reproach.

‘Yes, my dear, I am not likely to forget your sister,’ Lady Wrexmore answered, almost with impatience. But, in truth, it was her only son who absorbed the best affections of her heart.

CHAPTER III.

BEAUTIFUL DANCING.

CATHERINE'S desire for something new was before long fulfilled. Mr Freeman, the rector of Wrexmore, with his large wife and his large family, were all of them ever ready to promote innocent mirth and cheerfulness in the village. They reminded Lady Wrexmore that the annual school-feast was now due ; the children were hoping for it and expecting it as usual. The roses were still in bloom—currants and gooseberries yet lingered in the kitchen-garden—apples were beginning to ripen. Lady Wrexmore's benevolent assent was at once obtained. Cakes were soon ordered in lavish abundance ; presents were handsomely provided. Catherine

and Mrs Scudamore occupied themselves for a week in dressing dolls for the children, and in labelling and arranging both toys and useful gifts for every child in the school.

The excellent æsthetic High Church curate, Mr Orde, was a man inspired and highly wrought, devoted to every good work. He occupied this curacy as a merely temporary arrangement, until he could be appointed to some missionary sphere abroad. His aims were so high, his desire to do good so unlimited, that he felt cribbed, cabined, and confined in a small rustic parish. In early life Mr Orde's spirit of adventure had found an outlet in becoming chaplain to a man-of-war; and during a three years' cruise, he had formed a strong friendship for a young lieutenant on board the same ship, Kenelm Morant by name. He was now a commander, waiting for further promotion, on leave at home, and he came just

at this time to spend a few days with his old friend Mr Orde. When the day for the school-feast arrived, Catherine and Lord Wrexmore walked down together to the meadow behind the Rectory, where the festivities were going on. Mr and Mrs Scudamore were already there, with Lavinia Ogleby, who had energy and good-will for any amount of effort in amusing children. The feast was over, and games had just begun. Lavinia threw herself on the ground, and briskly organised 'Hunt the slipper.' Captain Morant, meanwhile, ran races with the elder boys, and devised a variety of amusements, which were a great success. Mr and Mrs Freeman took the privilege of elderly people, to repose on a green bench which was placed under the shade of some large elm-trees, whilst their many grown-up sons and daughters rushed about the meadow, and joined in every effort to keep the children

happy and amused. Catherine and her brother joined the Freemans under the shade of the trees, and as they sat together quietly watching the amusements that were going on around them, Catherine said to Mrs Freeman, 'I wish I could play with children, like Lavinia, and all your sons and daughters. How good-natured they are in playing all these games! I could do the same if nobody was looking on, but with an audience it is impossible—I feel too shy.'

'Of course my girls are quite at home in this kind of thing, and Miss Ogleby certainly finds no difficulty about it, she is so merry and so original,' Mrs Freeman replied; 'nor does Mr Orde's young naval friend, Captain Morant. They don't think about their audience, you see, because they don't belong to the place; no one particularly notices them. But of course, if Miss Irving were to begin running races, all

the village would want to come and look on. You must bear in mind who you are, no doubt.'

'Oh, it's not that!' Catherine answered laughing. 'I could not do it any better in a strange place than amongst our own people. You never could either, Edmund, even when you were quite well. We were always too morbid, too self-conscious perhaps—is that it?'

'Yes,' Edmund said. 'I could not face spectators at any time on a philanthropic occasion. Quite alone, as Catherine said just now, with fifty children, I could almost dance a hornpipe to give them any amusement, I believe; but I can't be free and easy if I am watched and commented upon by my neighbours all the time.'

'Very natural, very natural!' Mr Freeman cried. 'The head of a clan—the lord of a manor'—he was proceeding, when Lord Wrexmore exclaimed suddenly—

‘Good heavens! he *is* doing it!’

‘Doing what, my Lord?’ asked the rector, annoyed at the interruption to his own sentence.

‘Why, that naval officer, Orde’s friend, *is* dancing a hornpipe, I believe. What an amiable fellow he must be! and yet it jars on my nerves,’ Edmund murmured humorously to Catherine only, ‘so that I should like to bury myself under the earth.’

‘But how beautifully he dances!’ Catherine exclaimed. ‘Edmund, you are too fastidious—it is really wonderful. Do come nearer.’

‘Not for worlds,’ Edmund cried.

‘Mrs Freeman,’ Catherine said, ‘come a little way further with me; do let us watch that good-natured young man. Look how the children are laughing and crowding round! He will get dreadfully tired.’

‘No, not in the least,’ Lord Wrexmore said

laughing, 'he will go on all night ; a hornpipe is a thing which never ends.'

Mrs Freeman and Catherine had made their way into the admiring circle, just as Captain Morant was bringing his dance to a close. He had merely given a little specimen of what a hornpipe was like, and was now ready to superintend 'fighting cocks,' with two boys trussed with sticks and pitted against each other on the ground. His hilarity and good-humour were quite genuine, and both children and grown-up people caught the spirit of it.

At length the dressing-bell from Wrexmore Hall, announced that it was seven o'clock, the hour appointed for the close of the entertainment. The long shadows on the grass had already reminded Lord Wrexmore that he ought not longer to remain out of doors. Mr Orde ascended a green knoll at the end of the

meadow ; his tall spare form, and his pale, spiritual countenance were illuminated by the light of the setting sun, as he gave out, one by one, a few of the verses of Keble's 'Evening Hymn,' which the children sang after him. Captain Morant stood by his friend upon the rising ground. Catherine drew near and listened to the words—

'If some poor wandering child of Thine
Have spurned to-day the voice divine,
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin,
Let him no more lie down in sin.'

Catherine was touched by the clear innocent voices. 'Shall I ever spurn this voice divine?' she repeated to herself; 'could I ever endure to lie down in sin?'

The children now trooped off with their arms full of cakes and fruits and other presents.

Lord Wrexmore was going home with Catherine and Lavinia, when Mrs Freeman and her daughters hurried after them, to beg they

would stay and spend the evening at the Rectory. 'I know we must not ask Lord Wrexmore to risk the night air, but if we can persuade Miss Ogleby and yourself to remain, my dear Miss Irving, we shall be so glad. There is only a cold dinner, but we are to have a little dancing in the evening—just our own family—do pray stay and join in it.'

Catherine appealed to her brother with rather a wistful smile.

'Do you think mamma would object?' she asked, and Edmund at once sanctioned her remaining—he was touched by her appeal.

'Poor child!' he thought, as he walked briskly home through the Wrexmore shrubberies, 'she must indeed need cheering if even this little party at the Rectory is a gain to her. Two years ago she would only have thought it a bore and devised an excuse.'

The Freemans were kind and cordial, and

when dinner was over, and their young people had wheeled away the tables and prepared to dance, Catherine's spirits rose—especially when the best partner in the room was introduced to her—this was Mr Orde's naval friend.

It was nearly two years since Catherine had danced, and she was delighted to find that Captain Morant waltzed beautifully, and that he was as fond of dancing as she was herself.

Mr Orde and Captain Morant walked home with the two girls at the end of the evening, a servant from the Hall carrying a lantern to light them on their way. It was but a few minutes' walk, and the lantern was a needless precaution, for there was a full moon ; and as they approached the Hall, the old grey walls and mullioned windows, surrounded with myrtles and magnolias, were bathed in soft moonlight.

'I hope we shall meet again,' Captain Mor-

ant said heartily, as Catherine shook hands with him. 'I don't know when I have had such a delightful evening,' he added.

And Catherine answered in her gentle voice, 'It was very nice indeed.'

Lavinia and Mr Orde had been discussing whether planets were inhabited or not, and if inhabited, by what description of beings. They were all sorry their moonlight walk had come to an end.

The next morning Lord Wrexmore called at the farmhouse where Mr Orde lodged, and invited him to come with his friend Captain Morant to dine that day at Wrexmore Hall.

It was the first approach to a dinner-party since the death of the late Lord Wrexmore. A few old friends had been staying in the house, but no strangers had been invited there ; and it was a relief to Catherine Irving to see a new face, to hear a new voice, and to talk to a

stranger who could not be expected to sympathise with the misfortunes of the family.

Lavinia piqued herself on holding Broad views on religious questions ; and she dashed into theology before the soup was over. Mr Orde sat next her, and she soon engaged him in a vigorous argument upon the question of admitting eminent preachers of every denomination to teach in our churches. Mr Orde, of course, was strongly opposed to any such innovation, quietly holding his ground under a torrent of words from Lavinia.

‘ We want new life in the Church,’ she said ; ‘ sleepy old orthodox teaching does not belong to this age. Clergymen are crystallised into one groove. There is no progress, no adaptation to the spirit of the times.’

‘ Orthodox teaching need not to be sleepy,’ Mr Orde mildly replied ; ‘ and as to our crystallisation, is not truth crystallised ? can it

alter ? is it not in its very essence immutable, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be ?’

‘When you have once found out what is truth,’ Lavinia answered ; ‘but that is the question at issue. You are content to believe what you have been told—I require proof, and until I have obtained it I shall go from one teacher to another, till I have heard all sides, and probed all that is laid down as dogma in our Church, to its very foundation.’

‘Noah and his family were safe in the ark,’ Mr Orde said, ‘cramped and confined they may have found it, but in faith they abided the time when God allowed them liberty.’

‘They sent out the raven though, to see how the flood was going on ; they were not quietly acquiescent pent up in the ark.’

‘And the raven found no rest for the sole of his foot,’ Mr Orde replied.

‘But the dove returned with an olive branch,’ Lavinia answered triumphantly, ‘if you will carry on your metaphor ;—and after that sign of loyalty to the ark which had harboured her, she took flight once more into the open air, and never returned again.’

‘It does not follow that she judged rightly. Who can say that she found peace in her last flight?’ pursued Mr Orde.

Meantime Captain Morant had not for one instant thought of any one or listened to anything but Catherine Irving. It is not often in these days—it is indeed almost unheard of—for a well-educated young man to fall seriously in love at first sight. Kenelm Morant perhaps approached this condition as nearly as it is possible to conceive ; but he was not so much overpowered by his admiration for Miss Irving, as to be unable to appear to advantage ; he was only stimulated to be all the more

generally agreeable. Catherine was much amused by his light-hearted talk ; it was such a contrast to the sad and serious tone which had pervaded the house ever since the death of her father and of Lord Alwyn. She herself had been at first as much, or more, disinclined for laughter and cheerfulness as any of the rest of the family ; but this was not a natural condition, and was not likely always to continue. Captain Morant appeared to be seven or eight and twenty, but he had the high spirits and the careless frankness of a much younger man. His clear blue eyes met your own as frankly and fearlessly as a child's, and his waving light hair was thrown back from a wide open forehead, which could harbour no guile within. Kenelm's boyish laughter was infectious ; it was so unguarded and so hearty, the grave Mr Orde smiled perforce when he heard the sound, and paused

in his argument with Lavinia for an instant, and Lord Wrexmore felt drawn towards this honest, unaffected young sailor, whose whole bearing bore evidence that he was *sans peur, et sans reproche*. It was a relief and a change to their whole party to be with a stranger, who did not know enough of their many trials to be seriously oppressed by them ; and neither Lady Wrexmore's serene severity of suffering on her invalid couch, nor Lord Wrexmore's frequent cough—nor Catherine's pathetic eye-brows—subdued Captain Morant's flow of spirits. He not only recounted with unaffected good-humour, many interesting traveller's wonders, but he brought a well-trained and observant mind to bear upon the little everyday occurrences of ordinary life ; and in Mr Orde's simple village lodgings, or in the well-appointed Hall at Wrexmore, he was equally at home—obliging, friendly, and at his ease.

‘Your friend is charming,’ Lady Wrexmore said to Mr Orde. ‘Pray bring him soon again ; he amuses Catherine. It is pleasant to hear the dear child laugh once more.’

Captain Morant belonged to a class of men who are too easily set aside as commonplace. He had no remarkable gifts, nor had he any purely intellectual tastes. But the frank unguardedness and simplicity of his demeanour was very unlike the conventional reserve to which Catherine had been usually accustomed ; and there was a pleasant surprise in the contrast. Kenelm said what he thought—without reflecting what effect it would produce—and without caring whether he made a favourable impression or not. He was a gentleman by birth and education ; and though he was not highly polished, he was neither coarse nor vulgar. He was a man of honour, with an excellent temper, and a cheerful disposition. Lord

Wrexmore soon felt interested in him, and before the end of the evening, he had even entered upon his favourite subject, the land-tenure question, in conversation with Captain Morant, and he found from him a certain amount of sympathy in his views.

‘I don’t profess to understand home politics,’ Kenelm said, ‘living more than half my time on board ship; but my uncle, Admiral Morant—who has been a father to me all my life—has tried to convince me that it won’t do to allow day-labourers to rent land. He says it will make them discontented and insubordinate to their betters.’

‘Excuse me for demurring to those words, “their betters,”’ Lord Wrexmore said. ‘For my own part, I am inclined to place the labourer a good deal higher up in the moral scale, than his so-called superior, the British farmer, who is often just as thick-headed and narrow-minded

as the Squire, who thinks himself, in his turn, so high above him.'

Kenelm laughed, and said, 'That is candid, at all events. But I was only repeating the Admiral's way of viewing things. I don't hold with him. So far as I understand the matter, a working-man is entitled to rent what he can afford to pay for, and if he does climb up to be a step or two higher on the social ladder, all the better for him. There is elbow-room for all. He does not pull down those above him by climbing up towards them.'

'I am glad to find we agree so well,' Lord Wrexmore replied; 'and if you will give me the pleasure of showing you some part of this property, where I have begun attaching an acre or so of land to each cottage, you will be able to judge better as to the practical working of the system. That small piece of land, in the hands of the day-labourer, yields him as

high a profit as a hundred acres less closely cultivated by the farmers. Every child in the labourer's cottage, girls and boys alike, works with all his heart on his own father's land. The benefit of their labour is so tangible, there is every inducement against idleness.'

'And the best of it is,' practically observed Kenelm, 'that what you are doing now, purely for their benefit, will tend to your own clear profit in the long run; for you will be able to claim higher rent from the day-labourer than you can get from the farmer.'

'I don't know what my successors may do,' Lord Wrexmore answered with a sigh; 'for myself, I should not choose to make any advantage out of returns so fairly earned by honest labour.'

'Then I am afraid you would end by making a pet of the labourer after all, my Lord, and not be dealing out even-handed

justice, would you? Your farmers pay rent according to the produce of their land, don't they? However,' Kenelm added, 'the subject is a good deal out of my depth. I should feel more at home in a sea-dredging expedition with Dr Carpenter, man of science though he be, than trying to probe the land-tenure question here on shore. The fact is, I am not suited to a country life. I was brought up in London; and I like plays, and streets, and people, much better than peasants and scenery. I am sure, however—thanks to my friend Orde—I have found people here to-night, far more interesting than any I am in the habit of meeting in Montagu Square.'

Lord Wrexmore smiled, and gave the obvious answer—'It has been a mutual pleasure. I hope we shall often see you whilst you remain in this neighbourhood.'

'I shall be only too happy,' Kenelm replied.

‘I never was in this part of the country before. I came down here now, not only to see my old friend Orde, but to look at Merton Lodge, a place you may know perhaps, Lord Wrexmore. It belongs to the Boileau family—only two or three miles from here ; quite a small house, a sort of hunting-box. My uncle thought he ought to set up a country-house, now he has retired from the service, and he took a fancy to this little property, and is inclined to make a bid for it. But I shall do my best to dissuade him from it. It is a dismal place, to my thinking—no view, no distance, no wide horizon, such as you have here. I should feel pent up and imprisoned in a little villa like that. And so would he ; after the first six weeks, he would wish himself back in London. There is nothing attractive about the lodge except the house itself, which seems solid and well built enough ; not a mere pack

of cards, as so many modern houses are. But there's nothing to attach one to it. One can't take root so easily as he seems to expect, in a new place, without any associations to recommend it. I have been over there two or three times, but I believe I should forget what it was like in three days, if I joined a ship to-morrow. I think the Admiral has made a mistake, and he had much better stick to his familiar London haunts, his club and his old friends, and go to the seaside for the autumn, without bothering himself with a country-house of his own. If he takes the lodge, I am convinced he will regret it; but most likely he won't attend to my advice. He is a thorough old autocrat, though I am very fond of him all the same.'

Lord Wrexmore was rather amused by Captain Morant's ready flow of talk, and Catherine liked to listen. She evidently took

some interest in this good-looking and friendly stranger.

‘Don’t you play billiards, my Lord?’ was Kenelm’s next remark, ‘I see you have a table in the next room.’

‘I don’t play well,’ Lord Wrexmore answered; ‘but if you like, we will have a game.’

This was an unexpected innovation. Since the death of Lord Wrexmore’s father, the billiard-table had not been uncovered. Sir Philip Ogleby brightened up on hearing the click of the balls, and Lavinia also joined the game. Catherine undertook to mark, and Kenelm directed her from time to time, sitting by her side at every interval when he was not playing.

‘I wish you knew my uncle, Miss Irving,’ he said. ‘I don’t feel as if you could understand me, without seeing him. He is a very dear

old fellow, although he is prejudiced and one sided. You would be inclined to think better of me, if you knew him. He is so honest and so hearty—and yet he can't be trifled with. I am a child in his eyes still. He was a very gallant officer in his day; but once over sixty, you must be shelved at last in the service—that's the rule,—and he has made his last voyage now. My aunt, his unmarried sister, lives with him. She is as good as gold, but just as narrow, or more so, than he is. I scarcely dare swear my soul is my own, in their presence. But they have been father and mother to me all my life,—my own parents died before I can remember. So if I seem to you an odd, old-bachelor sort of fellow, a kind of petrified schoolboy—recollect please, that I have had an odd, old-fashioned bringing up, and make allowance for me.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASSION FLOWER.

DURING the next few days, Lord Wrexmore's ready sympathy with his sister, soon led to his observing that Captain Morant's society was very agreeable to her. He longed to see Catherine happy before he died—to leave her sheltered and protected. He asked Mr Orde about Captain Morant's early life—his professional reputation as well as his private character; and nothing could be more satisfactory than Mr Orde's account of his friend. 'In every relation of life he is excellent,' the curate said. 'He has the courage of a lion, and the tenderness of a woman; and, what is more rare, a strong religious faith. His unselfish-

ness is most remarkable. If you could see him with his old aunt and uncle—who brought him up—you would be impressed by his forbearing ways. He asks their permission before he accepts an invitation, and always explains to them where he is going, and who he is to meet.'

'I am afraid this only seems rather childish to me,' Lord Wrexmore answered sceptically. 'Surely a man at the age he must be—at least twenty-seven—is absurd to remain in leading-strings to such an extent?'

'Pardon me,' said Mr Orde. 'He can assert his will on great occasions; and I have known him cause serious offence to Admiral and Miss Morant by doing so; but about the little occurrences of everyday life, he says it is a pleasure to him to let them feel he is still under *their* authority—they enjoy it so much. You see, he has been under his uncle's orders on long

voyages so many times in his life, he has this additional reason for submitting to his authority—but I have known him rebel in a good cause.'

Altogether, Lord Wrexmore felt he might safely allow Catherine to respond, if she chose, to Captain Morant's evident admiration for her; and very soon both Mr Orde and his friend were invited to spend a fortnight at Wrexmore Hall.

Catherine's gay laugh once more was often heard, and the pathetic expression in her finely-drawn eyebrows, was now but seldom seen. Day by day her interest in Kenelm Morant increased—day by day they became more and more to each other.

Sir Philip Ogleby was the only one of the party at Wrexmore Hall, who could be designated 'a man of the world;' and although he confided to Lavinia his regret that Catherine

should be allowed to throw herself away upon a chance acquaintance, he could not help admitting that she might have fallen into worse hands. 'Captain Morant may not be exactly the Ferdinand that this poor little Miranda of a Catherine ought to have pitched upon, but what is to be done? This young sailor is at all events better than some dreadful Caliban, who would be sure to turn up if the poor child is imprisoned here much longer—with no greater excitement than a school-feast at the Rectory. She might have fallen in love with one of those young Freemans—not that they are Calibans—they are only very dull, worthy people ; but Morant is worth more than all that clerical set. He has seen the world—he is of gentle birth—and it appears he is his uncle's heir. Miss Irving might do worse.'

And Catherine never tired of listening, as another Desdemona, to the story of Kenelm's life :

'The battles, sieges, fortunes,
 That I have passed, . . .
 Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
 Of moving accidents by flood and field ;
 Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,
 . . . Of antres vast, and deserts idle,
 Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose head touch
 heaven,
 It was my hint to speak,—such was the process. . . .
 My story being done,
 She gave me for my pains a world of sighs :
 She swore,—in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing
 strange ;
 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful :
 She wished she had not heard it ; yet she wished
 That heaven had made her such a man : she thanked
 me ;
 And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
 I should but teach him how to tell my story,
 And that would woe her. Upon this hint I spake :
 She loved me for the dangers I had passed ;
 And I loved her that she did pity them.
 This only is the witchcraft I have used.'

In the midst of this transient revival of
 cheerfulness at Wrexmore Hall, a letter ar-
 rived from the Admiralty appointing Kenelm
 Morant to be post-captain to the *Sappho*, with
 orders to join in three weeks' time, The letters
 were always received at breakfast-time. Ken-

elm was sitting next Miss Irving, when the official despatch 'O.H.M.S.' was put into his hands. For an instant his honest face lighted up with pleasure, and turning to Catherine he said—'Here is my promotion. Good heavens!—how glad my old uncle will be!'

The next moment, he was aware that to go away in three weeks' time, would be a severe trial to him; and glancing at Catherine's expressive face, he saw a nervous quiver in her sensitive little upper lip, and that pathetic raising of the eyebrows which had more than once called forth his sympathy for her past sorrows. Kenelm was profoundly touched and agitated; he had been fully aware of his own attachment for some time past, but he had not dared to hope it was returned. Catherine Irving appeared to him too far removed from him; her refinement, her grace and sweetness, even her birth and her position, had made a

barrier between them. In his own humble estimate of himself, he was too rough and unpolished to be able to win the regard of so delicate a creature. He had resisted his growing passion for her. He had, as it were, marked it 'Dangerous,' and resolved to overcome it. And here were signs, which he could not but see were not those of indifference on her side. After a moment's pause, Kenelm continued, speaking in the same under-tone to Catherine—'This is a particularly fortunate appointment,' he said, 'because it is only a two years' cruise in the Mediterranean. One year has already expired. Poor Dunning is invalided and recalled, and I step into his place; otherwise I should have had to go for three years, of course. My uncle has been working to get me made a post-captain any time this last three years; night and day it has been his first thought, I truly believe—ever since.

I did some good service on the coast of Africa.'

'And is it—is it such a very satisfactory thing to you?' Catherine asked, with a thrill of pain in her voice.

Kenelm hesitated; he was not a vain man, but the emotion in Catherine's countenance quite overcame him. She tried to drink some tea, conscious of her own agitation, and anxious to conceal it; but her hand shook, so that she could scarcely hold the cup, and she hastily put it down.

'It is only a two years' appointment,' said Kenelm; 'but it will be a two years' banishment to me,' he added gravely.

'I am sorry,' Catherine answered.

And as every one else was talking or eating, or at all events, not observing them, Captain Morant was able to add in a low tone—

‘I shall ask you to tell me that again, Miss Irving, by and by—may I? Will you perhaps be on the terrace next the conservatory after breakfast? I must go up to town by the next train, and I should be very much obliged if you will let me say a few words to you before I go.’

Catherine was not too sternly dignified to object to this little assignation. She answered gently—‘Very well;’ and when breakfast was over, her graceful figure might be seen slowly flitting past the drawing-room windows, and Kenelm was already waiting near the conservatory to meet her.

‘You said you were sorry,’ he began, and his honest blue eyes flashed with eagerness as he took Catherine’s hand in his, and added—‘Will you tell me so again?’

‘No,’ she answered, ‘because it would not be true now.’

‘Not true! you are no longer sorry I am going away?’

‘I suppose I should be sorry if I quite believed it,’ Catherine said; ‘but I think perhaps you may not go after all.’

‘Ah, no! that is impossible,’ Kenelm replied; ‘I must go. But if you will only let me tell you how truly I love you—and if you will let me believe that you can ever, ever return my affection—I can bear any length of separation.’

‘But perhaps *I* cannot,’ Catherine answered, and her charming smile told him that he was beloved.

A shower of rain made them take shelter in the conservatory; and there they sat together on a rustic bench, which faced a rippling fountain, in the basin of which gold and silver fish were gliding. Passion flowers hung, with their falling tendrils, from the wall behind them. Kenelm broke one of them off, and gave it

Catherine, saying, 'Our love will have the cross in it which comes with all true passion. I must leave you for a time—oh, that you could be my wife before I go!' and as he said these words he drew her closer to him, and gave her that first kiss, which no true lover can ever forget. The fountain splashed and tinkled, and a ray of sunshine broke through the rain and fell upon the radiant plants by which they were surrounded—the heavy scent of the gardonias pervaded the air.

'Why must you go?' Catherine asked. 'Do you care more for promotion in your profession than for me?'

'I care for nothing in the world as I do for you,' Kenelm answered ardently,—'nothing that is consistent with duty,' he added. 'My own darling! let me now explain to you how constantly my uncle has longed and laboured to see me a post-captain before he

dies. He has been a father to me. His heart is set on seeing me take the command on my own quarter-deck. The dear old fellow would die with disappointment, if I turned aside from such a stroke of good fortune as this. Another thing, Catherine dearest—it is so delightful to call you by your name—I am a poor man, with very little beyond my profession to offer you. My future income rests entirely with my uncle. He is too generous to disinherit me because I disappoint his expectations, and quit the profession he has chosen for me; but have I the right to thwart and grieve and disappoint him, because I know I shall not suffer for it in the long run? Do you not feel with me, Catherine, that I owe him this sacrifice? You cannot understand what we feel about promotion in the service. You, and all your people, have got it ready made; you are all born commodores and admirals, as it were; but for us, of the com-

mon herd—we have to earn our credentials—and we take an honest pride in honours fairly won. If I had not been able to show I had some pluck in me on one or two occasions, I should not have got this step at my age now—I am not yet twenty-eight. I must be at the Admiralty before four o'clock, and then to Montagu Square to see the dear old man, and tell him my two pieces of news. A ship and a wife in one day—it is too much happiness,' and Kenelm buried his face in his hands. After a minute he looked up, and his eyes were full of tears. 'I was thanking God for it all, Catherine,' he said. 'We shall none of us prosper in life if we don't do that, I take it. And now let us consider what is to be done, at once. I have to catch the 11.30 train—will you tell Lord Wrexmore and your mother what I have said to you? To-morrow I come back, and I will plead for you myself; but will you pave the

way for me, dear? will you ask them to consent to my plan—to *our* plan, is not it?—to marry *now*, at once, and let me have the consolation of knowing you are mine when I am far away. If I can win their consent to this, I will retire on half-pay as soon as my two years' term is up; and it is such a splendid station, darling—the Mediterranean! Why, you can easily come out to Malta, and I should see you whenever I could run on shore. Malta would not be a bad place for your brother, would it?’

‘You talked of duty just now,’ Catherine answered sadly; ‘you must remember I can’t leave mamma, when Edmund goes abroad again. She suffered so much in travelling about, this year, that she has been much more helpless ever since. Of course he will soon have to go away again—and I believe he will have to go alone with the Scudamores. It is terrible

to me to allow him to leave England without me. I have always been with him hitherto ; but I do not see the possibility of leaving mamma, and in that case, you see, I must be without you.'

'It will be my last cruise, dear. I promise you that—unless war breaks out with the Yankees, or anywhere else—I am yours for ever when I come back ; and meantime we shall write to each other, my little Catherine—and you will tell me all your troubles and anxieties, and I shall think of you day and night ; in fair weather or foul, rough or smooth, I shall see your sweet face smiling upon me, and bringing a blessing with it. Kiss me, dearest, once again—for I must go.'

CHAPTER V.

AUTUMN DAYS.

KENELM was gone, and Catherine had told her mother and her brother all that had passed. 'To say the truth,' she said afterwards, when she was alone with Lord Wrexmore, 'I have taken such a dislike to Admiral Morant, that I can scarcely keep my temper when Kenelm speaks of him as "that dear old man." He is positively repulsive to me ; and I don't see why I am to be sacrificed to him, and obliged either to put off marrying for two years, or to marry directly, which I don't like at all.'

'Do nothing in a hurry, dearest Catherine,' Edmund said ; 'think it well over. For myself, I believe I disapprove more of a long engage-

ment than of a hasty marriage. If you are quite sure you care enough about him, you can very easily go out and join him at Malta, as he says. As his wife, you will have opportunities of meeting during this two years—but this could not be if you are merely engaged. Catherine, I could not consent to your engaging yourself for two years. You are not the sort of girl to bear suspense and uncertainty; and for myself, dear, I long too much to see you safe in the hands of one whom I can trust before I die, to allow you to be tied down. Marry at once—if you love him well enough—or else break it off absolutely and entirely, that is my advice.’

‘I can’t break it off,’ Catherine answered. ‘He is the only creature I ever cared for in the least, except poor Alwyn. I can’t go on changing from one person to another, Edmund. I am not so fitful. You know how faithful I was

for three years to my poor Alwyn. Though I was not engaged to him, I always preferred him to every one else in the world. When you go abroad, Edmund, I shall be very miserable—and I am never likely to meet any one who will in the least take the place of Captain Morant. Let us be engaged, Edmund. As to going out to Malta, you know I must remain with mamma. She cannot be left alone whilst you are away.'

'You must think it well over,' Lord Wrexmore answered. 'I am quite clear it won't do to have a long engagement; but if you decide to marry at once, I will not oppose it. You have eight hundred a year. I can make this a thousand, and I shall certainly do that. Morant has some small income of his own—two hundred a year, did not you say? So that, with his half-pay as a captain when he comes back, you can marry, if you choose to

be a poor man's wife. And then it seems there are expectations from the "dear old uncle,"' Edmund continued with a laugh.

'I shall poison the dear old uncle,' Catherine answered, also laughing. 'I am dreadfully jealous of him and of his sister already, and I foresee they will hate me and make themselves odious. If it were not for them, Captain Morant would not insist on accepting this appointment. It cannot really signify whether he is a captain or a post-captain. Who knows or cares about these distinctions except a few naval men?'

'Ah! but you see the navy has been Morant's world for the greater part of his life,' Lord Wrexmore answered. 'I think you are wrong, dear, in not trying to sympathise with him about this appointment. It is conferred upon him in recognition of distinguished service off the coast of Africa, against the slave-

trade. It could not be refused without ungraciousness ; and besides, his half-pay will be improved, of course, when he retires as a full captain.'

In talking this matter over with Lavinia, Lord Wrexmore admitted that Captain Morant was not exactly all that he had hoped and wished, for his favourite sister. 'It is not the want of money or family, that I am thinking of,' he said. 'They can do very well as to income, if they only love each other enough ; and he is not pretentious or ill-bred, but there is nothing distinguished about him. I have always regretted so much,' he added, with some hesitation in his manner, 'that Horace Ormonde never thought of Catherine. That would have been a delightful alliance.'

'Horace Ormonde will never marry, I am convinced,' Lavinia said. 'He is too fastidious, and too much spoilt by admiration.'

‘No, indeed, you are wrong there,’ Lord Wrexmore answered eagerly; ‘he is very much admired and sought after I admit, but he is perfectly unspoilt by it—the least affected and the least selfish man I know.’

‘I differ from you,’ Lavinia replied. ‘There is an air of conscious power in his whole bearing—a certainty of pleasing and of being welcome wherever he goes, which riles me about him. I make it a point to take him down whenever we meet, and I admit that he bears it with good temper, or at all events with good-breeding, for he is a man of too high a polish to allow one to see if he has any temper or not. For my own part, I consider Catherine is more likely to be happy with this thoroughly human, commonplace, kind-hearted young officer, than with a hackneyed man-about-town like Horace Ormonde.’

‘What a phrase to apply to my greatest friend! Lavinia, you do not appreciate Ormonde’s really great qualities. If he were not devoted to his father, he would have been here with us now. But old Mr Ormonde is very much out of health and out of spirits, and Horace will not leave him.’

‘And when do your other visitors arrive?’ Lavinia continued, with an effort at carelessness.

‘Mr and Miss Aylmer are coming to us tomorrow,’ Edmund replied with gravity.

‘And we leave the next day,’ said Lavinia. ‘Perhaps it is as well,’ she continued, ‘for though Marion is my cousin you know, we don’t suit.’

Lord Wrexmore did not answer this observation, and Lavinia could not pursue the subject.

Marion Aylmer had resolved to renew her engagement with Lord Wrexmore. In the

first distress of his illness, every one had agreed that all must be broken off. Lord Wrexmore and Mr Aylmer had considered it absolutely necessary. Edmund had submitted to their decision without remonstrance. How could he plead to marry the girl he loved when he had been told he might not live five years longer—and when he knew that he was doomed to a hopeless complaint? But since that sad time, a year had passed away, and he was not so much worse as might have been expected. Careful watching and a mild climate had kept the disease to a certain extent in abeyance. Youth is hopeful, and the young Lord Wrexmore sometimes found himself speculating on a ten years' spell of life instead of five.

‘Indeed this is not impossible,’ Mr Scudamore assured him. ‘Humanly speaking, it is in your own hands; with constant precaution

Marion Aylmer had heard this opinion. She knew also that Lord Wrexmore was now his own master. She liked him for his own sake very much, but she was ambitious, and she liked him also for his wealth and his position. She was six-and-twenty ; and in her worldly-minded wisdom, she considered that nothing half so eligible was likely to fall in her way again.

Mr Aylmer had some idea of what was in his daughter's mind in proposing this visit to Wrexmore. Marion had reminded him that the engagement had been broken off on the understanding that they were to remain 'friends,' and how was this possible if they never met ? Mr Aylmer's first wife had been sister to Sir Philip Ogleby, and had been an intimate friend of Lady Wrexmore's. Mr Aylmer had married again, and had another daughter, Margaret, who remained with her mother in London

when he brought Marion to Wrexmore Hall. It was understood on each side that Marion could not bear to keep aloof as a stranger from those who had once been so intimate with her. The end of the autumn was approaching ; Lord Wrexmore would soon be leaving England once more. Marion simply wished to shake hands with him again,—Mr Aylmer would like to spend two or three days with his old friend Lady Wrexmore. This had been the substance of Marion's letter. She arrived by a late train, with her father, only just in time to dress for dinner. Lord Wrexmore, however, met her in the hall, and with graceful assiduity showed her the way to the rooms prepared for her and for her father.

‘It is my old room, Edmund,’ Marion said, as he left her at the door. ‘How good of you to think of that!’

She had called him ‘Edmund,’ in the old

familiar tone, just as she used to do a year ago, and Lord Wrexmore's heart beat with suppressed emotion.

Marion Aylmer was a very agreeable woman. She was never at a loss for conversation. She had an excellent temper, and an even flow of cheerfulness. Her manners were good, and she wore a beaming and happy expression at all times, which made her everywhere welcome. Although not exactly handsome, she was decidedly very good-looking. She possessed a particularly brilliant complexion, and her coils of light hair were artistically arranged. She had a good figure, and a good taste in dress. Lavinia was completely extinguished by her cousin's arrival, and she moodily brooded through the dinner, where she was placed between Mr Aylmer and Kenelm Morant, who had just returned from London, and was radiantly devoting himself once more to Catherine Irving.

‘My dear old people,’ he told her at the first convenient moment, ‘are only half pleased at my engagement, Catherine.’

‘I quite expected that,’ she replied ; ‘I told Edmund they were sure to hate me.’

‘Not that indeed,’ Kenelm answered,—‘not that in the very least ; but they can’t bear to think of my retiring on half-pay so early. They will get reconciled to it by degrees ; but you must not be hurt with them if they don’t yet understand what a blessing I have found in you.’

After dinner Lavinia withdrew to Lady Wrexmore’s room, and sat with her for the greater part of the evening. As she wished her good-night at last, Lavinia said, ‘Perhaps I shall not see you in the morning, Lady Wrexmore ; we go soon after breakfast. The autumn is come—your son will be moving southwards for the winter no doubt. Will you bear in mind that my brother Paul and I could easily spend

a winter abroad if we chose. My father can spare me well enough. Lord Wrexmore likes Paul—I believe he likes me. If we can be of any help, let us know ; we are old friends, we should be glad to be of use. Don't rush into any wild romantic scheme, for want of a sober rational offer from reliable people, that's all.'

'Dear Lavinia, how good you are!' Lady Wrexmore replied ; 'but indeed we have only planned that the Scudamores shall go with Edmund—nothing wilder than that—unless indeed, by God's blessing, I may be enabled to go with him myself.'

Lavinia withdrew to her own room in deep depression of spirits. Lady Wrexmore was obtuse—blind to her son's danger.

'If Marion Aylmer were only worthy of him, I could bear it,' Lavinia repeated to herself. 'But she will drag him down—and what can friendship do to save a man from his wife?'

CHAPTER VI.

DIEU DISPOSE.

‘L’HOMME *propose*,’ and sometimes the sequence follows as he has planned it. ‘*Dieu dispose*’ is not always the contrary to our own blind, short-sighted wishes.

In a very few hours after Marion’s arrival at Wrexmore Hall, she was once more engaged to Edmund. In a few days more it was decided that Catherine and her brother should be married on the same day, and that Marion should go off to the Continent with Lord Wrexmore, at the same time that Captain Morant joined his ship at Gibraltar.

Objections flowed in from Catherine’s married sisters, and from her two brothers-in-law.

The Honourable Frederick Brabazon was so completely opposed to this utterly hasty and unconventional proceeding, that he wrote in much excitement to say he could not think of allowing his wife to come to the wedding.

‘Wrexmore’s marriage is a different affair,’ Mr Brabazon wrote to Lady Wrexmore. ‘He gains a charming companion, to whom he has long been attached—a wife who will be more devoted than any hired attendant who could be found ; and if Miss Aylmer and her family are willing to run the risk of his precarious health, we are all very much indebted to them, in my opinion. But what pressure exists for Catherine’s marriage ? Why is she to be sacrificed to this seafaring adventurer, who marries and leaves her, as “ William ” might have left his “ Black-eyed Susan ? ” Who is Admiral Morant ? What future provision has he settled upon his nephew ? I assure you, my

dear Lady Wrexmore, I am amazed at Edmund's weakness on this occasion. His own happiness in regaining Miss Aylmer, has dazzled him into giving his consent to a scheme as wild as any I ever read in the wildest sensational romance. Leonora agrees with me ; she sends her love, and says that nothing will induce her to sanction the marriage by coming to the wedding ;' and Frederick considered this argument must prevail.

Lord Porchester was not quite so severe in his opposition. He was of a more indolent temperament, and allowed his dear Emily to express her own surprise and reluctance at Catherine's hasty marriage, in her own affectionate way. Finally the Porchesters were induced to form part of the small wedding-party assembled at Wrexmore Hall for the double marriage—which took place there a few weeks after Captain Morant received his promotion.

No other visitors were invited to the wedding, except Marion's father and her stepmother, with her half-sister Margaret, a beautiful girl of seventeen, who, with Lady Porchester's three little girls, formed a small group of bridesmaids. Mr Orde performed the ceremony, which took place in the private chapel at the Hall, by special licence. It was his last ministerial duty before leaving England for a distant mission to which he had lately been appointed. He was to embark for Africa in ten days' time, by the same P. and O. steamer which was to take Kenelm to join his ship at Gibraltar.

Lady Wrexmore's couch was wheeled into the little gallery of the private chapel, from whence she could watch the ceremony, and offer up her heartfelt prayers for a blessing on her beloved children.

Catherine and Captain Morant went off im-

mediately for a week to the Isle of Wight, while Lord and Lady Wrexmore left England directly after their marriage. A travelling doctor had been found to supply Mr Scudamore's place. He and his wife remained with the Dowager at home. It was thought possible that, under this arrangement, Catherine might, after a time, be able to visit some place in the Mediterranean where she could meet her husband. Admiral and Miss Morant insisted on accompanying their nephew to Southampton, and on seeing him off. Their repugnance to his marriage was so great, that Kenelm considered it would be only increased if they were to meet Catherine at the painful parting moment; and Mrs Morant found that her husband could be firmer than she had been prepared to expect. His tenderness and gentleness with her were all that she could desire—but it was impossible not to see that he

expected obedience—almost unquestioning—from his wife.

‘The journey to Southampton is only an hour, darling, from Wrexmore. It is better for you that I should leave you here—sheltered and looked after—with your mother and your own people about you, than that you should travel with me that little way, and have to meet my relations, who look on you coldly, and who would not sympathise in our farewell. When I return, my own dearest, you will see how cordially I will make them love and value you—there is not time now. Let me go alone.’

Mr Orde, however, was able to accompany his friend as far as Gibraltar, from whence he was to proceed to Central Africa, and would probably be no more heard of for another year or two. It was a consolation to Catherine that Kenelm would have a friend with him for the first few days of their separation.

‘He will remind you of me,’ she said, with her sweet smile, as they talked of his passage to Gibraltar.

‘Shall I need reminding, little faithless ? Do you think you will ever be out of my thoughts ? I shall keep a journal for you every day,’ he added ; ‘and every time the budget for England is made up, I shall send it off ; and you shall do the same for me, Catherine. How I shall long for your letters !’

In ten days after his marriage, Kenelm bade farewell to his bride and started for Gibraltar. A few weeks had passed away. Catherine had received the promised journal from her husband, posted at Gibraltar immediately upon his arrival there :—‘My own beloved,’ Kenelm wrote, at the last moment on board, before going on shore, ‘we shall land only a few minutes before the post closes. I send you my daily journal, in every page of which you will

see your image has never left my heart for an instant. I could talk and laugh with the other passengers during the day, and smoke with Orde at night, listening to all his grand schemes for converting the niggers, God bless them—but all the while I saw your soft dark eyes, and heard your sweet voice, darling—close, close, to me! You must come out soon—very soon. Lady Porchester promised me she would take care of your mother, and spare you for two months “before long”—how long? A few lines in pencil were added:—‘On shore at Gib. Too late for post to-day. No letters yet to hand. My sweet love, I know you will have written; but if by any ill chance I miss your letters here, they will follow me to Malta; they will be safe, but I don’t know how it is they have failed me here. Orde goes on, as you know, to Alexandria. Some machinery is out of order in the P. and O.

steamer, which gives her eight hours' delay instead of six as usual, and we have put in near the Ragged Staff for convenience in repairs. Here I write on a bench in the Alameda. Beautiful gardens—bands playing—Orde walking about in his long clerical coat, listening to the music, and making notes in his little notebook. I must do something to amuse the old boy, else I'd sit here scribbling to you for an hour or more. I am going to take him a ride into the country, to the town of San Roque; which is more Spanish than Gib. Orde is always bent on sight-seeing, and he has gone over the galleries here, and O'Hara's Tower, and all the rest of it, in old days. If it were not for him, you may be sure I should be off to the *Sappho* without more delay, and finish writing to you there, darling, from my own home. Say what you will, my little Catherine, I am glad to be at last my own master on

my own quarter-deck, before I knock under, and "live at home at ease" with my dear, dear wife. I have your locket always round my neck, with your sweet face in it, to cheer me with its pretty smile when I am getting low and wish for you so much—so much; then I unclasp my little chain and look at you. Now for our ride to San Roque. I shall post this letter there. We are just going off to get our horses; a good gallop will be refreshing. It is awfully hot—baking, thundering, red-hot heat. Not a cloud to be seen, but there's a roll out at sea. Good-bye, my beloved one! good-bye—till I reach Malta—and we can fix the time for you to come out there. God bless you for ever, my own, own angel wife.—Your loving KENELM.'

This was Captain Morant's first letter to his wife. Catherine read it with avidity; and wrote

many sheets—filled with equally tender language to her husband, to meet him at Malta. It was a consolation to read over every detail of his few days' passage—his lively descriptions of every one on board, his constant tender recollection of herself. She could not allow herself to make any plan for leaving her mother at present. Perhaps in three months' time, she had agreed with Kenelm, the question might be raised, and her good-natured sister Emily was ready to do everything in her power to make amends for Catherine's absence. Even the more severe Mrs Brabazon was dutiful as a daughter. The irritable Frederick still refused to give any countenance to Catherine's hasty marriage, and although he did not prevent his wife from corresponding as usual with her sister, there was a certain constraint about it. Leonora Brabazon had never seen Kenelm, and this was a missing link which could not be filled up, in

this instance, by loving, cordial interest and sympathy.

Mr Brabazon's strong disapprobation of the marriage made any reference to it embarrassing. Catherine, indeed, was treated more or less as a culprit by all her family, excepting always her mother and her brother. Their firm support was her greatest consolation. But Edmund was abroad with his wife, and his own new-found happiness could not but absorb him a great deal. He had married a woman who possessed many charming qualities, but she was not unselfish enough to remind him to be less wrapped up in her—on the contrary, she could not see that a devotion so legitimate in itself could be carried to any excess, and finding it exceedingly pleasant to be adored, she encouraged Edmund's absorption in herself by every means in her power.

When, therefore, a time of anxiety and dis-

tress arrived, Catherine's only resource was in her mother, whose unflagging affection and sympathy were ever ready for her. But the Dowager Lady Wrexmore's absolute want of worldly wisdom, made her but a frail staff to lean upon in a case of much complication and perplexity. She was an excellent woman ; devout, high-minded, and unselfish ;—and yet, Lavinia was not far wrong when she called her 'obtuse.'

The extraordinary simplicity of the Dowager's nature made it impossible for her to see two sides of any question. There were no mysteries—no perplexities in life for her. Everything was plain and clear to her—everything, however painful, she could accept at once, with unquestioning submission.

CHAPTER VII.

NO LETTERS.

No one could explain why it was, but after the affectionate letter which Catherine received from her husband on his arrival at Gibraltar, she never heard from him again. She wrote by every mail, and telegraphed repeatedly, imploring a reply. No answer came, and yet the arrival of the *Sappho* at Malta, had been duly announced in the papers.

Day after day Catherine watched in vain for news from her husband. At first, various friendly excuses devised by the Scudamores or by Mr Freeman, kept her from positive alarm ; but when three weeks had passed, without any

more direct news than could be obtained from applications at the Admiralty, Catherine, and all her friends with her, began to be very seriously disquieted.

One of the grooms with a quick horse was employed to fetch the letters from the post-office every morning, so as to ensure receiving them immediately after they arrived. Catherine watched daily from her bedroom window for the return of this messenger, and at the sound of the horse's hooves her heart seemed to stand still, until the door of her room was opened, and the faithful Mrs Scudamore would appear. She was always up and dressed early enough to meet the man with the letters, and bring them at once to Catherine's room. The expression of her face day after day, full of sympathy and of regret, was enough to prepare Catherine for the continued disappointment which each day brought to her.

At length, however, instead of Mrs Scudamore's appearing with a sad shake of the head as usual, she came running into the room with a joyful countenance, and an outstretched hand, bearing a thick packet in Captain Morant's own handwriting.

‘At last, dearest, dearest Mrs Morant! here is the long looked-for letter.’

Catherine snatched it eagerly from her friend's hand, and tore it open in an agony of suspense and expectation. Mrs Scudamore discreetly left the room, whilst Catherine was stunned and bewildered to find that her own letters were returned to her in this thick packet, which was enclosed in a few lines from Kenelm Morant, dated ‘Valetta Harbour,’ and with this ominous beginning—

‘MADAM,—I am much concerned to think of the confusion and annoyance which must

be occasioned, when you learn that the enclosed letters have fallen into my hands, and that I am at a loss to conjecture for whom they are intended. They were addressed to me, consequently I opened, and read enough of each letter to convince myself that some strange mistake had occurred—but without being able to find any clue to it. I do not know of any one else of my name in the service, but it is possible that some new appointments have taken place lately, and that there may be some other Captain Morant who ought to receive these letters. I therefore return them to you with my sincere regret that they should have been opened, and I assure you that if any more should arrive in the same handwriting, I will not again run the risk of reading what is evidently not intended for me by opening the envelope, but I will return them to the dead letter office in England. It may be as well to

add, that I am not married, and never remember to have met any one who came from "Wrexmore," the place from which your letters are dated.

' With much regret for this unfortunate accident, which I fear must cause you much embarrassment, I remain, madam, yours faithfully,

KENELM MORANT,

*H.M.S. Sappho, Valetta Harbour,
Malta.'*

' After waiting anxiously for nearly a quarter of an hour in the gallery outside Mrs Morant's room, expecting to be called in, Mrs Scudamore ventured to knock at the door. She longed to hear good news; but she knocked in vain. No answer came, and when at length she decided to go into the room without waiting any longer, she found Mrs Morant in her loose white dressing-gown lying back, white and unconscious, in the arm-chair where she sat.

The letter from Kenelm was still tightly clutched in her hand. Mrs Scudamore could see that it began 'Madam.' She saw that some terrible calamity had occurred, and immediately fetched her husband.

No one else was staying in the house, and any sudden shock might bring on a fresh attack for the Dowager in her precarious condition. Mr Scudamore decided at once to telegraph for Lord Porchester. He also sent for Mr Freeman; as rector of the parish, and an old friend of the family, it appeared desirable to ask his advice. Meantime Catherine was put into her bed, and when she began to regain consciousness, Mr Scudamore administered a quieting medicine, and enjoined absolute rest. But after a shock so terrible, no rest was possible; and Catherine's condition soon became one of high fever. Mr Scudamore and his wife watched and nursed her with the most



devoted attention for many days together. The Dowager became terribly distressed and agitated. It was impossible to keep back the fatal letter from her any longer.

Mr Freeman undertook to read it to Lady Wrexmore, and to do his best to soothe and support her. She did not fall into unconsciousness like poor Catherine, nor become violently excited as every one else had done, but she was very deeply pained and grieved for her child's sake.

'He is mad, Mr Freeman, that is quite clear,' the Dowager said with her usual rapid decision. 'How little we could have foreseen such a calamity! We must resign ourselves to bear it.'

'Nay, nay, my dear madam!' answered Mr Freeman; 'we must not resign ourselves till we know it is a case past praying for. Let us act and pray first, and when all else

fails, resign ourselves if you will. But there is still much to be done. First I propose to telegraph to Captain Morant—"Letter received. Wife very ill. Telegraph to explain."'

'I beg you will send very carefully worded sentences,' Lady Wrexmore said. 'In a case of life and death, as this is for my dearest Catherine, you may send any number of words; pray, Mr Freeman, remember this.'

'Oh, yes! by all means,' Mr Freeman replied; and though of a frugal mind, he wrote again, at greater length, a more explicit message.

Meantime Mr and Mrs Scudamore had been consulting together, and it was agreed between them that the doctor on board the *Sappho* should be written to confidentially by Mr Scudamore, and an explanation entreated from him. A Naval List was sent for to the nearest town, and the name of the surgeon on board the *Sappho* was eagerly sought out. 'He may

chance to be an old acquaintance,' Mr Scudamore said ; and so it proved. 'Yates, W. H.,' was the name of a former fellow-student of Mr Scudamore's in his early hospital days. 'It is years since we have met, but Yates will remember me ; and he was a good fellow—he will do his best for us,' said Mr Scudamore hopefully ; and he at once wrote and posted a letter to Mr Yates, after which he felt justified in giving Lady Wrexmore this little ray of comfort, that he knew Yates, the surgeon on board the *Sappho*, and that from him some clue might be obtained as to Captain Morant's mental condition. Meantime Lord Porchester had telegraphed, and had since written, to beg that Mr Freeman and Mr Scudamore would take 'this painful affair' into their own hands. He had 'consulted Brabazon,' who thought dignified contempt the best course the family could take until more tangible facts transpired. Mean-

time, for the sake of soothing Catherine and satisfying her mother, any steps might be taken towards clearing up the mystery that appeared desirable, 'without compromise of dignity.' So Lord Porchester wrote.

'Cold-blooded, phlegmatic man of the world!' cried out Mrs Scudamore as she read this letter; 'you, Robert, will put them all to shame. Compromise of dignity, indeed! and poor Mrs Morant's life or death is hanging in the balance.'

'Not quite that, I hope, Julia my dear,' Mr Scudamore replied. 'Mrs Morant is young and elastic by nature. It is an awful blow, but it is worse to bear any mystery than a definite misfortune. When we get Yates's answer, we shall know, I hope, what it all means. Even madness is not incurable. Let us hope for the best.'

CHAPTER VIII.

CAN THE ROCK SPEAK?

By slow degrees Catherine's fever was subdued—she recovered her strength, and with it came back also a certain amount of spirit and energy. She would not lie down in despair, and accept Kenelm's cruel renunciation without resistance. Some strange fraud must have been practised upon him. He must have been led to believe that she did not deserve his affection. He was resolved to test her fidelity by professing to ignore their marriage. Some faithful family friend must be found to send out to Malta, and to demand an explanation. There had been no time for marriage settlements, or any of the usual legal

intervention, before Catherine's marriage ; but her fortune was settled upon herself, 'for her sole use and benefit,' by Captain Morant's express request, and a document to this effect had been duly signed by him before he left England. This document could be shown to him at Malta, as well as a copy of his marriage certificate. To this was also added a carefully worded letter of dignified remonstrance, written by Lord Wrexmore at Nice, and forwarded to England to be signed by Lady Wrexmore, and by her son-in-law, Lord Porchester, as well as by the family solicitor, who had all been present at the marriage.

After much discussion and consideration, it was decided that this delicate mission should be entrusted to Mr Freeman, the rector of Wrexmore, and that he should go out to Malta and confront Captain Morant. He had known Catherine from her infancy,

and he was sincerely attached to all the Wrexmore family. He was dull, but he was a man of strict probity and honour. The liberal arrangements which Lady Wrexmore would make with him would far more than repay him for the time and trouble devoted to this expedition; and Mr Freeman's large family united in approving a course of action which would not only bring peace of mind to Mrs Morant, but which would spread out amongst them the unwonted sum of some hundreds of pounds, to assist them in their various necessities. Mr Freeman, however, was an elderly man, and could not be hurried. He required at least a fortnight to prepare for the voyage to Malta, so as to leave everything in order in his home and parish during his absence.

Meantime the surgeon of Kenelm's ship had answered Mr Scudamore's letter. He wrote with the habitual reserve of a medical

man, and in the dispassionate tone of a stranger, which was terribly exasperating to poor Catherine, in her intense anxiety and distress.

‘I am much concerned to hear your perplexity as to our Captain, and his marriage with Miss Irving,’ the doctor said. ‘A more honourable man does not exist than Captain Morant; and were it not for the circumstantial details that you send me, I should certainly have believed this to be a case of mistaken identity. It is not a very easy task for a man in my position on board ship, to question his commanding officer upon his own private affairs; and I must own I do not yet see my way to an opening for doing so. I have, with due caution, asked in a casual way of two or three of our officers, if the Captain is married? They all answered, “No! certainly not that they ever heard of.” You will quite understand, my dear Scudamore, that

your letter of inquiry remains as a sacred trust with me, and that I could give no further reason for asking the question than mere curiosity. You ask, "Is Captain Morant flighty, eccentric in his conduct? and if I have any reason to fear a tendency to insanity?" pledging yourself, at the same time, to consider any communication on this head as strictly privileged and confidential. I see no sign whatever of mental delusion or cerebral disturbance. His spirits are fairly even—tending perhaps to seriousness, but never to any excess of melancholy. He is particularly alert in all his duties, and is obeyed with cheerful alacrity by all on board. I will do my best to approach the difficult task you have set me with due caution and judgment, and will let you know from time to time, if I can gather any ray of light to transmit to you. For the sake of old days, when we worked together at

Bartholomew's, I should be glad to help you in bringing any consolation to your friends. But it seems to me there must be some mystery of so delicate a nature, involved in this affair, that a bystander like myself, in no way personally concerned in it, who may presume to approach it, will do so at the risk of being set down as an impertinent busy-body. I will, however, watch my opportunity, and do "what in me lies." But I own I am not sanguine as to the result.—Yours sincerely,

W. H. YATES.

'*P.S.*—With regard to any locket and chain, containing a portrait, to which you refer, I have seen the Captain bathing, and have purposely observed him undressing—but he wears nothing of the kind.'

Dr Yates had perhaps never in his life written any letter which was so anxiously

longed for by those whom it concerned, and yet it brought nothing but anguish and disappointment to Catherine and to her ever-sympathising mother.

‘We must submit,’ Lady Wrexmore began, clasping Catherine’s hand in hers ; but as she spoke, even her high courage gave way—and as she caught sight of her daughter’s pale and heart-stricken face, she turned aside upon her pillow, and wept hot tears of sorrow and disappointment.

‘It is such a cold, matter-of-fact, odious letter!’ Mrs Scudamore cried out with her usual commonplace excitability ; but Catherine could not discuss it.

She pressed her mother’s hand in her own with nervous agitation, and said only—‘Now, let us hurry Mr Freeman. Pray, Mr Scudamore, go and tell him it is worse—the news is worse—and he must get ready and go out to

Malta at once—do you hear?—he must go at once.’

Mr Scudamore agreed to every suggestion that could possibly console Catherine ; and with friendly zeal immediately rushed off to the Rectory.

Dr Yates’s letter, after all, was not ‘unkind or odious ;’ but it expressed in business-like language the natural view which a stranger would take under the circumstances.

It was only after Mr Scudamore had gone off to hurry Mr Freeman’s departure, that it suddenly occurred to Mrs Morant that she might go under his care to Malta. She had been so little used to independent action, and had always been considered so necessary to her mother, that even her ten days’ absence with her husband immediately after her marriage had appeared to her scarcely justifiable. She was afraid of discussion and of opposition ; but,

to her great relief, every one approved her resolve, and helped her to carry it out.

Mr Freeman preferred the long sea-passage, to the shorter route through France, *viâ* Marseilles. He was not used to travelling, and at sixty-five he was disinclined to begin. The voyage would present no complications, and, after all, there was not any imminent haste in the matter. The *Sappho* was likely to remain for at least several weeks longer at Malta; two or three days' delay could not be of any serious importance. On the whole, Catherine was glad to travel in the same manner as her husband had done, when he left her only a few months since. She had a vague hope that at Gibraltar she might gain some information about him. There he had written to her—there no mystery had fallen between them.

No misfortune, however distressing in its kind, could prevent Catherine from taking

some pains to appear to advantage with those she loved. She could not help giving a few moments' consideration to her costume for the passage out ; and as she recollected the great possibility and hope, that a reconciliation with her husband was in store for her at Malta, she ordered the most becoming travelling-dress she could devise, in which to go on board the *Sappho*.

A higher nature would have ignored such petty considerations at so serious a crisis—but Catherine's little merits were not as yet equal to the great trials of her life. Up to this time she had been a light-hearted, sweet-tempered girl, with an affectionate disposition—ready to love, but ardently craving for sympathy and affection in return for what she gave. She was now called upon to go through an ordeal of suffering, which it was beyond her present strength to meet—or even thoroughly to realise.

She could not believe that anything so dreadful as her husband's permanent alienation from her was to be her fate ; and a fresh hope sprang up irrepressibly within her, as she prepared with glad alacrity for her voyage.

Catherine's mother solemnly blessed her on her way, and strenuously concealed the anxiety she felt as she sent forth her delicate child on her melancholy expedition. A maid and an experienced courier went with her. Mr Scudamore saw her on board the Peninsular and Oriental steamer at Southampton, where Mr Freeman joined her, with all the necessary documents under his charge. Catherine was borne up by hope and the excitement of going out to meet her husband. Once face to face with Kenelm, she could not but believe that all would be explained ; and during the long ten days' passage, as she rested day after day in her narrow berth—prostrate, with weakness

and suffering—hopeful visions floated through her mind of finding herself at once welcomed with rapture by her husband—of meeting his honest blue eyes full of tenderness and trust, and of hearing him explain that some fraud had been practised upon them both. At Gibraltar, Catherine resolutely exerted herself to go on shore. The steamer stopped there for six hours, and she told Mr Freeman, ‘It was here that my husband wrote to me for the last time as his wife. He added a few pencil words to his letter sitting in the Alameda, where the band was playing, just before riding off to St Roque with Mr Orde. Let us go there—let us go, Mr Freeman, to the Alameda. I feel as if some inspiration would come to solve the whole mystery if I can see the exact place where he was when he still belonged to me.’

They went on shore, landing as usual at the Waterport. Mr Freeman gave Catherine his

arm, for she was still dizzy from the motion of the vessel, and they walked slowly through the town together. They passed the Ragged Staff Guard, and walked into the gardens of the Alameda, where a military band was playing spirited music, and groups of gay and well-dressed people, careless and light-hearted, were walking up and down the promenade.

At any other time, Mrs Morant would have enjoyed the whole scene very much, but, as it was, she gazed around her with intense and melancholy interest.

‘If the Rock could only speak!’ she said to Mr Freeman, as she leant wearily on his arm. ‘I feel as if Kenelm was in the air of this place—as if he would answer if I called. Cannot we try to find out something about him here?’

‘My dear Mrs Morant, you know he is at Malta,’ Mr Freeman answered kindly. ‘There

is nothing to be gained by making inquiries about the very few hours he spent here. Passengers are coming on shore so continually, it would be mere waste of time to ask questions. How could any one here identify our description of him ? and if they did remember the departure of the *Sappho*, how would it help us ?

Catherine sighed and remained silent. They had now sat down on a bench in the Alameda. 'Perhaps this is the very place where Kenelm sat, when he wrote his last kind words to me,' Catherine said. 'It is very strange, Mr Freeman, but I feel a presentiment that if we only stayed here and inquired thoroughly, we should discover something to help us. May I question the guard here ? There are several English officers standing about there ; do let us go and ask them if they remember the day that the *Sappho* left Gibraltar.'

Mr Freeman was not a man of prompt decision ; he stood still for a minute in some perplexity. 'I don't see the use of it,' he answered, with the usual English dislike to address strangers, or to discuss any private affair with them. 'I really see no advantage in drawing attention to your own and Captain Morant's affairs in this manner. You would not wish to proclaim to all the world the peculiarity of his conduct ; and to go amongst strangers and question them about your husband would be to lower your dignity and self-respect.'

'Oh! I don't care for that,' Catherine answered ; 'what does it signify in a matter of life and death, of eternity or annihilation ?' she added impetuously.

'If you insist upon it, I will go and make some inquiry by myself,' he said with obvious reluctance ; 'but I must first see you safe on

board, and our time on shore is running short,' he added, provokingly looking at his watch.

'But I could wait here,' Catherine said, 'or I can go back to the steamer alone, quite well.'

'No, no! there are too many young fellows about, my dear; you are too young to be alone in a place like this, even for a few minutes; you might be followed and embarrassed by some kind of attention. It is best not to attempt any inquiries here,' he added, more decidedly than before, for he clearly perceived, even with his unsophisticated mind, that Catherine's sweet expressive countenance—her graceful figure—and the good taste of her pretty grey travelling-dress, had already attracted considerable attention. Many English officers were passing rapidly to and fro, with an air of studied carelessness—endeavouring by the way



to gain a closer view of the charming young creature, over whom her conscientious companion kept so strict a guard. 'We must go on board at once, indeed we must,' Mr Freeman now said again; 'there is really no time to lose.'

And Catherine, in her weak and weary bodily condition, sadly submitted; but as long as the grim rock of Gibraltar, bristling with its array of guns, was in sight, she remained on deck, and felt as if she was parting over again from Kenelm. 'He still loved me when he was there,' she repeated to herself. '*There* he still wrote to me, "My own darling!"—*there* he had no wish to disavow me. What has happened since to make him disown me? Oh! my Father,' she cried to herself, clasping her hands in an agony of prayer, 'give him back to me! let me have his love once more! Clear away his illusions, if they exist, or enlighten me to understand him—to explain to him how greatly he has

misjudged me.' And as the last faint outline of the Spanish coast faded away, Catherine's heart again cried out, with an ineffable yearning of affection, 'Good-bye, Kenelm! good-bye, my beloved—my own lost husband, good-bye!'

Mr Freeman at that moment joined her to recommend her going down below. 'The air is always chilly and damp just after sunset in this latitude, my dear Mrs Morant. I don't think it is wise for you to remain on deck any later;' and he gave her his arm, and helped her to make that dexterous backward descent of the companion-ladder, which is supposed, by the experienced voyager, to be the correct thing to achieve on board ship.

CHAPTER IX.

ESPRIT DE CORPS.

A FEW days more, and at early dawn there were animated voices crying out that Malta was in sight. Passengers were soon crowding on deck, taking turns to look through telescopes, joyfully descriing the port of Malta with its two fine harbours, and the long neck of land on which the capital of Valetta is built. Though Catherine was of a nervous and excitable temperament, she was usually calm on great occasions. The supreme moment had now arrived which was to decide the future of her whole life. She was soon dressed, and on deck with everybody else. Mr Freeman looked grave and anxious; he saw a

bright ray of hope on Catherine's countenance; and as she shook hands with him, she said with a radiant smile—

‘At last, Mr Freeman! We shall see Kenelm in an hour.’

‘Do you see the *Sappho*, Captain?’ asked Mr Freeman with friendly zeal, as he saw the Captain of the steamer was reconnoitering the harbour through the large telescope.

‘There are two frigates, besides one iron-clad,’ the Captain answered; ‘the lower one must be the *Minotaur*—the other is about the size of the *Sappho*, but I can't say for certain that it is her. Will Mrs Morant look for herself?’ and he kindly adjusted the glass to its proper focus for her, and then left her with Mr Freeman.

‘How provoking that man is! How can I distinguish between frigates and any other vessel?’ cried Mrs Morant impatiently.

Just at this moment a lieutenant and midshipman, with a captain's gig, came alongside the steamer, to bring off a naval officer on board who was going to join his ship in the port.

‘These gentlemen will be able to tell you, no doubt, if the *Sappho* is still in the harbour,’ said the Captain, now joining them again, and good-naturedly waiting to introduce the lieutenant, who had just reached the gangway, and was coming towards them.

Catherine murmured to Mr Freeman—

‘This suspense is dreadful. The *Sappho* must be there—it is there, of course. Why should we ask?’

Mr Freeman pressed forward to meet the officer, saying—

‘May I ask, sir, if Her Majesty's frigate the *Sappho* is still in harbour?’

The young officer was impressed by the

serious earnestness of Mr Freeman's tone, and called up an air of official importance as he answered—

‘The *Sappho*, sir, left the great harbour yesterday morning for the Archipelago.’

‘You don't say so?’ Mr Freeman cried out in great consternation. ‘This is most unfortunate indeed. Captain Morant, of course, was on board?’

‘She did not sail without her captain, you may be sure of that,’ answered the lieutenant with a smile.

Catherine did not scream or faint, but she tightly grasped the hand of her faithful old friend Mr Freeman, and in a trembling voice she now asked, ‘Where is he gone?—do you know the name of the place?’

‘I am not sure,’ the officer answered, a little touched by Catherine's evident anxiety. ‘I think it was to be Syra at first—and then to

go on farther, or to cruise about according to circumstances.'

The officer now concluded his interview was over, and courteously raising his cap to Mrs Morant, he turned to speak to the officer he had come to fetch.

'One moment!' Catherine cried, interrupting him again. 'Do tell me where can I go to find out any more? Captain Morant is my husband, and I came to see him'——and bursting into tears, she could add no more.

The young man was much embarrassed by her distress, and could only say—

'I am awfully sorry—I am sure, if I had known, I wouldn't have told you so suddenly. You had better go and ask the Admiral's flag-lieutenant, Mr Worrall, at the Admiralty House, when you get on shore. He can tell you all about the *Sappho* much better than I can. I am really awfully sorry!'

There was a confused noise on all sides whilst this short conversation took place under 'the glare of the hot and copper sky.' The steamer was completely surrounded with boats. Dusky little boys were crying out in Maltese jargon, or sometimes in English, 'Dive for a halfpenny!' 'Throw me a penny!' and performing various absurd antics in the water for the amusement of every one who had time to notice them.

Mr Freeman was anxious to get Catherine on shore as quickly as possible, out of all this clamour and confusion; and leaving the courier to settle everything else, he got Mrs Morant into a boat with her maid, who carried a large, though light, travelling-bag in her hand. They had soon landed; and as they stepped on shore, the young midshipman who had been in charge of the captain's gig met them with a go-cart, which is the Maltese version of an

Irish jaunting-car, in which they drove through the perpendicular streets. The midshipman said his captain had desired him to show Mrs Morant the way to the Admiralty House, and to ask if he could be of any further use to her in the town in any way.

‘We will just go first to the Hotel,’ answered Mrs Morant wearily, ‘if you please,’ she added, to the midshipman, with a sob in her pathetic pleading voice—and leaning on the arm of Mr Freeman, she climbed the staircase of the Imperial Hotel; then leaving her old friend to go back and smoke a cigarette outside the house with the young officer, who still so kindly escorted them, she withdrew to her room, followed by her maid. She had been almost stunned by disappointment and distress, and yet her characteristic feminine vitality was not extinct. Mrs Morant would not go straight to the Admiral’s house, as any

true heroine would have done—after dressing so hurriedly that morning on board ship. She was very, very miserable indeed, but still—

‘One would not, sure, look frightful when one’s dead ;
And, Betty, give this cheek a touch of red.’

So Pope represents Narcissa on her deathbed ; and if Catherine lived to be seventy, she would certainly still study the picturesque in her outward appearance, to the last—though not with such vulgar aids as paint and powder. Whatever her age might be, she would adapt herself to it, and accept it—but always in a ‘becoming spirit.’ Catherine bathed her beautiful dark eyes, which were red with crying, and allowed her maid to re-arrange her hair, and to produce a fresh set of clothes in which she could appear with tolerable advantage before any strangers from whom she must ask news of her husband.

Mr Freeman had long finished his temperate

cigarette, and had exhausted his patience in keeping up a desultory conversation with his young companion. They paced slowly up and down the hot pavement before the Imperial Hotel in Palace Square, watching the ceremony of mounting guard, in the full glare of eleven o'clock sunshine, for more than twenty minutes, whilst Catherine made her little preparations ; and when at last she appeared, looking exquisitely fresh and nice in her pretty, though quiet dress, Mr Freeman, with all his loyalty, thought her most inconsiderate—even heartless, to have wasted time in making herself look so well, and he walked by her side to Admiralty House in perplexed silence. But she had merely followed an irrepressible instinct of her nature. To be untidy, or to appear in any unbecoming costume, was impossible to Catherine Morant. She was always picturesque, always perfect in a little peculiar

way of her own—tied down by no rules of fashion, but by a sense of harmony and suitability.

Outside the Admiralty House, the young lieutenant who had come on board the steamer, was loitering about, on the watch for them, kindly anxious to be of use. When Catherine appeared, he came forward with pleasant frankness, as if he had been an old acquaintance, saying—

‘Mr Worrall is quite ready to see you, Mrs Morant, and to give you every information in his power;’ and he showed them into the house, and left them with the flag-lieutenant.

But their interview did not last long. The one broad fact was only too closely confirmed. The *Sappho* had left Malta, and was to cruise about according to circumstances, until further orders, in the Archipelago. It would probably

be several months before she returned to Malta.

Mrs Morant had one more hope, that the Admiral himself might be able to help her, and she begged Mr Worrall would ask him to allow her to speak with him at once.

‘He is just now very much occupied,’ the Secretary said ; ‘he is reading his despatches from England. But in a case of such pressure, I will do my best to get you an interview ;’ and in a few minutes he returned, and showed Mrs Morant into the Admiral’s room. Mr Freeman remained outside ; he thought Catherine would best express herself alone.

‘I am very sorry for this disappointment,’ the Admiral said, as he courteously shook hands with Catherine, ‘and very sorry that we were none of us aware that Captain Morant was expecting you—or perhaps you intended to take him by surprise?’ he added with a

kindly smile ; and seeing how pale she looked, he gave her a chair, and sitting down also himself, waited with an air of patient attention for what she had to say.

‘I had not told my husband I was coming,’ Catherine began with some embarrassment. ‘I was very anxious to see him ; he had not written lately, and I thought I had better come.’

‘It is a pity he did not know,’ the Admiral said gravely ; ‘he never even told me that he was married. We were none of us aware of it.’

‘We were only married ten days before he left England,’ Catherine said, and the tears filled her eyes.

‘Very hard upon you and upon him too, to have to part so soon. I wish he had mentioned it ;’ and the Admiral was evidently a good deal bewildered. ‘I hope my old friend Admiral Morant is quite well ?’ he added

after a moment's pause. 'Have you seen him lately?'

Mrs Morant coloured slightly, and said—
'No; I do not know him—there was not time before Kenelm left England.'

'Admiral Morant was not able then to be present at your marriage?'

'No; he disliked it altogether,' Catherine said desperately; 'he gave it no sanction. I do not know if it is through some intervention of his, that I have not heard for so long from my husband; but I sometimes fancy it must be his fault.'

The Admiral shook his head.

'My old friend Morant would never deal a blow in the dark,' he said rather sternly. 'I hope you have some friends with you here, to advise you better than I can do—as a stranger to your family affairs. Anything that occurs to you to ask from me in my official

capacity here, I shall have pleasure in doing for you, if it is in my power.'

'My brother, Lord Wrexmore, was too ill to come with me; but an old friend of our family is with me—Mr Freeman, the clergyman of my brother's place at home.'

'Indeed!' the Admiral replied, still more perplexed than before. 'I am afraid I can do nothing to help you at present,' he continued, rising from his chair by way of concluding the conversation. 'But if you should find that I can be of any use, pray command me;' and he held the door open for Mrs Morant to leave the room. She was much distressed, and stood irresolute for a moment.

'It was only on professional grounds,' she said, after a moment's hesitation, 'that Admiral Morant objected to Kenelm's marrying me, and also because it was in such a hurry.'

The Admiral did not answer, but still remained at the open door, waiting with an air of grave concern, for Mrs Morant to go away ; and chilled by this stiff official demeanour, she said—

‘I see I am disturbing you,’ and bowing coldly, Catherine left the room utterly discouraged.

The Admiral did not choose to involve himself in discussions about the private family affairs of a stranger ; it appeared to him that something wrong must have occurred in connection with this hasty marriage, since his old friend had disapproved of it. Perhaps Mrs Morant had run away from somebody else, in order to marry the nephew of his old friend Admiral Morant. If this were so, his disapproval was fully explained. At all events, in his important official position as Admiral of the Fleet, it would not be ‘good form’ to act as the

partisan of this exceedingly interesting young lady, until he knew her true history.

An hour later, Mr Freeman obtained an interview at Admiralty House, and explained all the circumstances of Mrs Morant's hasty marriage—her blameless life, and the noble and high-minded character which distinguished the Wrexmore family. But in his vehement denunciations against Captain Morant and his uncle, Mr Freeman showed too much zeal to propitiate the Admiral. *Esprit de corps* made him an unsympathising listener to an advocate on Catherine's side.

He could only say, 'It was a strange story, and one which would certainly require to be explained in good time. There were no more honourable men in the service than the two Morants. Both uncle and nephew had always been distinguished and respected by officers and men alike. They were incapable of acting

dishonourably by a woman. Some mystery must remain behind, to account for their conduct. Meantime, if he were called upon to give his unprejudiced advice, the Admiral said, 'he should strongly recommend that Mrs Morant should return to England without delay. It would be better for her to wait patiently at home with her family, rather than to follow the *Sappho* to the Archipelago. She might be exposed to very great annoyance and discomfort in following Captain Morant from port to port—especially if it is contrary to his own wish that she should do so. If I may advise,' the Admiral continued, 'I should certainly recommend the return of the lady to England. In little more than another year, the *Sappho's* term of service is up, and you will have her captain at home again, when, no doubt, all will be explained.'

CHAPTER X.

TRY AND FORGET.

CATHERINE'S courage had now quite given way. When Mr Freeman returned from the Admiralty House to the hotel, he found she had gone to bed; she was completely worn out, and could bear up no longer. He wrote her a note describing the uselessness of his interview, and did not see her again until the next morning, when a new plan had occurred to her elastic mind; and knocking early at Mr Freeman's door, before he had finished dressing, she called out to him in her gentle pleading tone—

‘ Mr Freeman, there is a steamer to Marseilles this evening—do, pray, let us go by it. I will

join my brother at Nice, and if you are in a hurry, you can return to England, and leave me with Wrexmore. I want to see him more than anything else in the world. Do please settle it directly.'

Mr Freeman was much relieved. He was not of an enterprising temperament. He hated travelling, and he had been afraid that Mrs Morant would urge him to take her on, in pursuit of the *Sappho*. If she had proposed it, he would have felt it his duty to acquiesce. But to leave her with Lord Wrexmore, sheltered, protected, and resting after the cruel disappointment she had just gone through, approved itself to his calm and benevolent mind.

Although the Admiral of the Fleet had thought it right to harden his heart, and to take no active part in helping Catherine, every one else at Malta who had heard anything of her story expressed their sympathy to the best

of their power. Mr Worrall, the flag-lieutenant, brought his wife to call upon her, and sent her a bouquet of beautiful flowers from his garden.

Mrs Worrall was a light-hearted friendly little woman, and she felt the most genuine pity for Mrs Morant's distressing position. She was overflowing with curiosity about it, and though good-breeding made her refrain from asking questions, she ventured to speak of Captain Morant directly she was introduced to Catherine.

'I have had the pleasure of knowing him for some months,' she said, 'ever since the *Sappho* was stationed here; indeed, only three days ago I was dancing with him at a ball at the Palace.'

'How did he look?' Catherine asked eagerly; 'did he seem happy?—did he talk much? Do tell me everything you can.'

'He did not look exactly unhappy,' Mrs

Worrall answered; 'but he was grave and serious, and he would not waltz; he said it made him dizzy. He only walked through two or three quadrilles, and told me he did not care for dancing.'

'How strange!' Catherine said. 'The first time I ever saw him, he was dancing at a village school-feast to amuse the children, and afterwards he waltzed with me repeatedly; and he used to be always so gay with me—just like a boy.'

'He is not gay now,' Mrs Worrall answered, 'and yet he looked serene and quiet.'

'He did not seem anxious?' continued Catherine; 'he did not mention me—did not tell you he was married?'

'No, indeed,' Mrs Worrall replied; 'no one here had any idea of it. But I must say I never saw a man flirt less, and that is some comfort, is it not?' she added kindly. 'He

did not care for the balls here, though we all think them such fun. You know there are at least ten gentleman for one lady, and very often two gentlemen have to dance together to make up a set. Ladies are in the greatest possible request. I often have to waltz with four or five partners in turn for the same dance.'

But Mrs Worrall observed that Mrs Morant was no longer listening with any interest to what she was saying. An account of the gaieties of Malta, was not likely to throw any light on Kenelm's cruel neglect of his wife, and Catherine was far too unhappy even to attempt to take an interest in anything that did not bear upon the one subject that absorbed all her thoughts.

'I see you are very tired,' Mrs Worrall said considerably. 'I will come again and see you on board the Marseilles mail this evening; but I shall leave you to rest a little now.'

The young lieutenant to whom Mrs Morant had spoken on board the steamer, left his card, and called again later in the day, to ask if he could be of any use. Even the little midshipman came back again, and made the excuse of bringing some English newspapers with him, for the sake of seeing Catherine's sad, sweet face once more. Indeed, she attracted compassion and interest wherever she appeared.

Mr Freeman in the meantime made a rapid survey of all the principal points of interest within a day's reach in the island. But Catherine was too weary and depressed to leave the hotel. She was glad when the time came to re-embark for Marseilles. All her new friends asked leave to come and see her on board, and Mrs Worrall even shed tears of sympathy as she parted from her—promising faithfully to write and tell her any, 'even the

smallest scrap of news,' that she should be able to obtain about Captain Morant.

The discomfort of a second voyage, and the hurried journey by land which followed immediately upon it, were quite forgotten when Mrs Morant found herself arrived at Nice, and once more with her beloved brother—the tenderest, and most sympathetic friend of her life.

Mr Freeman remained only for a few days with them. He was out of his element abroad, and was anxious to return to his family and his parish duties in England. He was dimly conscious that he had not been quite equal to this affair, and that he had been of very little use.

Marion was glad, however, to avail herself of his escort to Paris. Her father, with Mrs Aylmer and Margaret, were spending some weeks there—it was an excellent opportunity to go and see them; and, with ready tact, Lady Wrexmore explained to her husband that dear

little Catherine would be all the better if she could find herself alone with him, and able to pour out her heart to him without restraint.

This was a time of peace and of comparative happiness to Mrs Morant. She was relieved to find her brother was not apparently any worse than when he had left England, and his spirits were much improved. Sometimes he talked of the future with hope. With regard to Catherine's own trial, Lord Wrexmore strongly urged her to give up all further attempt to clear up the mystery until Captain Morant should return to England. 'Try and forget that you are married ; look on it as a dream that you have gone through all this misery,' Edmund said. 'In less than a year it will all be explained. Either he is mad, or he is acting under some pressure, perhaps from his uncle—for what object it is impossible to say ; but the only thing for you to do, is to try and forget.' Of course,

really to forget was impossible, but Catherine gained comfort from her brother's avoiding the subject of her great sorrow. He acted towards her exactly as he had always done, with the same playfulness and ready good-nature—the same frank laughter when he was amused. To Catherine's impressionable nature this was the best treatment possible. She had been receiving too much sympathy for a long time past. Even the servants approached her with faces of concern, when they asked her the most commonplace question. There had been a perceptible restraint—a wistful interest, in every word or look in her life at home, for this last few months; even if now and then she had forgotten to be miserable for a little while, she was recalled to it by the pitying glance of her devoted mother, the respectful homage of Mr Scudamore, and the sharp clear-sightedness of his well-meaning wife.

Edmund steadily encouraged her to be cheerful. One evening, in the soft moonlight, the brother and sister sat together at the open window ; they watched the rippling lines of light on the gentle waves of the tideless sea, a boat here and there gliding past with a sail which there was scarcely wind enough to keep up. A band of music was playing airs from "Norma" on the promenade ; the sound, subdued by distance, was peaceful and soothing. Edmund put his arm round his sister's waist, and kissed her forehead as he said, 'This quiet does you good ; you feel calm and happy to-night, don't you, dear ? So do I ; it is such a comfort to have you with me, as in the old times. Catherine, there is great wisdom in Tennyson's two voices. Do you remember how he says—

" That every cloud, that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love ? "

And how the poem ends—

“So variously seemed all things wrought,
I marvelled how the mind was brought
To anchor by one gloomy thought.
And wherefore rather I made choice
To commune with that barren voice,
Than him that said, ‘Rejoice ! rejoice !’”

Marion's visit to her family at Paris, was protracted to very nearly two months. She was fond of Lord Wrexmore in her own quiet way, but she was not at all sorry to have a good reason for amusing herself at Paris. It was so good for Catherine to be alone with her brother, and to be encouraged to forget some of her own distress of mind, in order to be a cheerful companion to him.

‘If I return at once,’ Lady Wrexmore wrote to her husband, ‘I know our poor little Catherine will shrink up into herself again, and will no longer exert herself for your sake. Papa will stay with me as long as I am able to remain at Paris, and he and I are always good company for each other, as you know.’

Margaret has grown handsomer than ever, and is much admired ; but she does not care for Paris as much as I do. I revel in the *Français*, and shall bore you to death with all my ravings about Bressant, Got, and Delaunay when I come back. Remember, however, my dearest love, that I long to be with you again, and my best and most real enjoyment is when I am with you, surrounded by the familiar range of the *Alpes Maritimes*, to whose friendly shelter we owe so much. But you know my frankness ; since I *am* at Paris, I don't pretend that I am not very fairly amusing myself, though it would very soon pall upon me if I remained here much longer without you.'

When Marion returned to Nice, Catherine felt it was easy to do her duty and to rejoin her mother in England.

She had now been three months away from

home ; and though the Dowager wrote most affectionately, urging that Catherine should remain for any length of time, if she found consolation in her visit, she could not altogether conceal her longing desire to see her poor dear child again, especially as Lady Porchester was obliged to leave her ; and Catherine parted from her brother, re-assured about his health, and strengthened by the peaceful time they had passed together.

Perhaps it would have been well for her if she had remained abroad under her brother's care. But it seemed right to go back ; and Catherine was most tenderly welcomed home by her mother, who had now removed to her son's London house in Princes Gate.

CHAPTER XI.

A MAN OF SENSIBILITY.

THERE was much to attract and interest in Horace Ormonde. His nature was peculiarly sympathetic. Perhaps he possessed more sensibility than depth in his affections ; but he was one of those people, of whom there are but few in the world, who possess a distinct charm apart from every other merit—an attraction difficult to describe, but impossible not to recognise. He was an accomplished man of the world, without being hard or selfish. His character for honour and high feeling had never been impeached. Yet many a woman's dreams had been haunted by his dark expressive eyes. The sympathy of his grave, kind,

smile was watched for, as a consolation, by many of those who sighed in vain for tender words from him. Though susceptible, he was eminently fastidious ; and to be admired by Horace Ormonde was a distinction not easily obtained. As an enthusiastic lady friend of his once said of him, ‘ A look will disgust him for life.’ There was a gravity and dignity in his general bearing, which scarcely indicated how much life and spirit and power of enjoyment lay beneath. He had been devoted to his father, and for the last year or two, during the long illness before his death, Horace had scarcely ever left him, and had seen nothing of his friend Lord Wrexmore.

He remembered Catherine as one of the few women for whom he had felt a genuine admiration and regard. He had heard of her sudden marriage, however, without a pang, for he had been too much absorbed in other

affairs, and more especially of late, in his father's illness, to have taken any more interest about the subsequent history of Lord Wrexmore's sister, and he knew nothing of her distressing position.

As soon, however, as Horace heard that the Dowager was in town, he went immediately to call upon her. Mrs Morant was at home, and she received him in the drawing-room, whilst a servant went to ask if her mother was well enough to see him.

It happened that the news of Lord Wrexmore had been bad that day, and as Horace showed his own unaffected concern at the bad report which Catherine had to give of her brother, this touch of sympathy upset her, and she burst into tears. Some men are bored by tears, and are repelled by them ; to others, there is a pain so keen in witnessing this sign of grief when they have no power to relieve it,

that the sight of tears is almost a signal for the tenderness which springs from genuine compassion.

Horace was greatly moved by Catherine's distress. And as she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed for a few moments without restraint, it was with difficulty that he could prevent giving way himself. He took refuge in pacing up and down the room. At last, as her sobs appeared to subside, he stood still before her, and in a tone of deep feeling said—

‘Dear Mrs Morant, this is very bad for you. You will make yourself ill if you go on crying so much; will you please try to leave off?’

‘Oh! it does not signify,’ Catherine answered impetuously. ‘There is no one to care—even my brother has his wife. Except for mamma, I am absolutely alone,’ and here she wiped

away her tears, walked to the window and flung it wide open.

Horace slowly followed and stood beside her; his kind heart bled for her—she looked so young and so handsome, even in the midst of her tears, it was difficult to believe that she could be uncared for by her husband; and yet it was clear that this violent outburst of grief, was not caused only by the bad news about her brother.

‘What would become of Lady Wrexmore without you?’ Horace said at last, afraid of making any reference to the mysterious husband, who seemed to form so small a part of Catherine’s life. By this time her natural calm and gracefulness of demeanour had returned, and without answering Horace’s question, she said quietly—

‘Will you come upstairs and see mamma?’

The Dowager was on her sofa as usual, in her own sitting-room upstairs—which looked

out upon the Park. In spite of her constant suffering, there was a grandeur in her air, as of victory over some persistent enemy. She had risen above bodily suffering, had accepted and assimilated it; there was a calm solemnity in her demeanour, which made you feel yourself on consecrated ground as you approached her. She was kind and courteous, but she rarely smiled; and although she never complained, you were oppressed by a sense of suffering and calamity in her presence, which you felt was far too real and too deep to be reached by human sympathy.

‘My son’s friends are always welcome here,’ the Dowager said, extending her wan hand to Horace as he came into her room. ‘Our news to-day, as Catherine will have told you, is not good; and, poor child! she is much overcome, as you see;’ for Catherine left the room as her mother spoke. ‘It is through tribulation

that we must enter His kingdom.' She quoted Scripture freely, not in any canting spirit, but simply because she read no other book. 'My children are sorely tried, Mr Ormonde; but our Father knows what is best for them.'

Horace could not readily answer. He was but little used to discuss such questions except in an abstract way; and it would have appeared to him an impertinence if he had ventured to speak. But his silence and his manner were unmistakably sympathetic; and the Dowager continued, almost in a soliloquy—

'Yes! my Catherine is sorely tried; but let His will be done;' and she clasped her hands together as if in prayer for a few seconds.

At last Horace ventured to say—'Mrs Morant was always so very much attached to Wrexmore.'

'She was—she is,' her mother replied absently; 'but this illness of my beloved son's

is not Catherine's worst trial by any means. Kenelm Morant is an enigma to us all. Three weeks after his marriage he accepted the command of the *Sappho*; that is now twelve months ago, and we have only once heard from him since he left England.'

'Good heavens!' Horace cried, 'is he supposed to be drowned?'

'By no means. We have frequent letters from Mr Yates, the surgeon of the vessel, with whom my friend—our dear doctor, Mr Scudamore, is providentially well acquainted—and through him we are forced to realise the fact that Kenelm has forgotten his wife. Whether it is a species of madness, or mere caprice and hardness of heart, we do not know; but he never writes, and he will not speak of her.'

'Was there any quarrel,' Horace asked, much interested, 'before they parted?'

'None at all,' the Dowager replied. 'It is

one of those mysteries which, no doubt, will be unravelled in due time—if not here, at all events beyond the grave. But my child is young still. She cannot yet conquer the natural craving for happiness which belongs to her youth; she cannot quell the hope that some explanation—some solution will be granted her. Almost by every post she expects it, and every post brings her a fresh disappointment. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, my dear Mr Ormonde. My Catherine must learn to vanquish hope, as regards the things of this world.’

‘Indeed, that would be impossible at her age,’ Horace answered, much moved. ‘I never heard a more awful tragedy, because it is so intangible. Poor young creature! what a terrible trial it is for her! I suppose you all write to him—to this Captain Morant, I mean? Does he get your letters?’

‘Yes; Mr Scudamore’s friend tells us our

letters reach him duly. Indeed, we have frequently enclosed them to Mr Yates, and begged him to give them with his own hand to Kenelm. No answer comes. And this has gone on for a year. We are a sad household, Mr Ormonde ; but our "times are in His hands ;" and I am thankful to say my child carries her cross bravely on the whole. She knows where alone to turn for strength to bear it, at all events.'

To Horace's impressionable nature, this dark shadow hanging over his friend's sister, awakened the strongest feelings of sympathy and compassion. He longed to help and to protect her ; and as he left the house, he formed a thousand schemes to seek out the *Sappho*, to seize Captain Morant by the throat, and to force him to give an account of his misconduct to his wife. If her brother had only been strong and well, he would long since have been off to Syra to obtain some explanation or

redress ; but his interference, in his precarious state of health, was quite out of the question ; and there was no other man in the Wrexmore family who would undertake to do it. They all had good excuses to offer.

Catherine's good-humoured brother-in-law, Lord Porchester, frequently expressed his great regret, in private family discussions, at the very sad state of things between Morant and his wife ; but he would add—' Depend upon it there is something we know nothing about, lying underneath it all, which is the key to the whole mystery. Catherine is a dear, good girl ; but she may have found out something, just before he left England, to make her jealous as to his past life. One never knows, when a fellow has lived about the world so much—no one can say what may have come out about him all at once. She won't tell us what it is, but, no doubt, she has very good reasons for

keeping it quiet. If she asked me to go out to him to-morrow, I would do it, of course, with the greatest possible pleasure ; but, you see, she don't ask it ; and my impression is, that she is not sorry to let things rest as they are. You never know what storms you may raise, if you try to reconcile two people in that relation to each other. It is proverbial that no outsider can be of any use in these cases.'

And so 'the family' remained passive ; and it was only through Mr Scudamore's acquaintance with the surgeon of the *Sappho*, that any sort of information could be obtained.

It was several weeks, even months—before Horace had any direct opportunity of testifying his interest in Catherine's distressing position ; but he continued to call at the house two or three times a week. His intimacy with Lord Wrexmore gave him a right to be received on an exceptional footing, and his

intense pity for Catherine gathered strength every day. By degrees he began to perceive that she became less melancholy and less pre-occupied in his society. Her greatest charm was in the mobility of her expression, and the gentle sadness of her usual demeanour was lighted up by the sweetness of her smile.

Horace soon made it the aim of his visit to dispel this sadness, and to obtain a respite from anxiety and depression for the sister of his dearest friend. By degrees, to hear Mr Ormonde announced, was enough to throw a gleam of radiance and of happiness over Catherine's countenance. It was no longer unusual or startling to hear her laugh and talk, as she had been used to do in early days. The Dowager rejoiced to observe the change, and frequently thanked Horace, with the grand simplicity of her lofty nature, for the blessing that his cheerful presence had brought amongst

them. To herself, it came like a revival of the days when her son had been well and active, and coming to and from his mother's house, before his terrible, malady had declared itself. No thought of imprudence or of danger for her beloved daughter, crossed the Dowager's austere and unworldly mind, as she cordially encouraged Horace Ormonde's frequent visits. 'Dine with us whenever you can spare the time to do so. My sweet Catherine has regained much of her early cheerfulness in your companionship. I look on your arrival amongst us as an interposition from heaven on our behalf. We needed cheering and consolation, and you have brought it to us.' And this almost sublime old lady, day by day developed a highly-wrought enthusiasm for Horace Ormonde, which acted as a tonic in her weak condition. For his sake she now began to take some interest in the affairs of everyday life. The grand old-

fashioned courtesy of her early training, came back, and roused her to exertion for her guest's entertainment. With considerable courage she decided to be carried daily downstairs, and to join Catherine and the Scudamores at dinner, in order that Horace should find her ready to receive him, whenever he chose to dine with them. A sofa was arranged exactly to fit the dinner-table, and to allow the Dowager to recline in her usual position, whilst she ate with her family, instead of by herself upstairs, as she had been used to do. Her rare smile, was seen more often now ; and although she still remained the gravest and most dignified of women, a gleam of sunlight had entered once more into her grim life. Mr Scudamore was a man of cultivation, and he occasionally found time to read some of the literature of the day ; but hitherto he had not felt justified in discussing any but strictly serious topics

with the Dowager. When he found that Horace was tolerated and encouraged, however, in speaking of more general subjects, the Doctor was glad to do the same, and the strict tension of an exclusively religious tone was now broken.

Horace delighted in mental analysis ; he continually found himself speculating on the characters and aims in life of those with whom he came in contact. The solemnity and silence which had prevailed in Princes Gate was now much ameliorated ; but there was no doubt that most young men would still have found it a terribly dull and depressing house to live in.

Horace Ormonde saw and felt the dulness and the gloom, but his intense interest in the lives of others was so strong an element in his character, that he never considered his own individual tastes, his own enjoyment, except as a matter of chance, which might come or not

by the way. To live in sympathy with his friends was his natural course of action. He had plenty of invitations to far more amusing houses; but he saw that he was of some comfort to the Dowager, and, it must be added, still more to her daughter; and he cast in his lot with them as it were—content to suffer with them—if he could only help to soothe and brighten their sad existence. As for his business as a barrister, this was but a nominal occupation. He had enough private fortune to do without a profession, and merely kept his terms because it might lead to an appointment, and also as a convenient excuse for having rooms at the Temple, where he could daily spend a few quiet hours, chiefly occupied in writing reviews and articles for one of the leading papers, which was an occupation more congenial to him than any lawsuits would have been.

CHAPTER XII.

BEWARE.

LAVINIA OGLEBY was one of the very few old friends who were admitted as frequent visitors at Princes Gate. She often dined there, honestly desiring, in her rough way, to divert their attention from their many sorrows ; and also, having once experienced a gleam of romance for Lord Wrexmore, she clung to his family with faithful tenacity, and was valued and respected by them all, although she could not, by the most charitable, be designated as an unvaryingly agreeable companion. Catherine was the more impressed by Lavinia's sterling good qualities, because they were so opposite to her own peculiar attractions. She

felt unfeigned compassion for Lavinia's plainness, for her awkward uncouth ways. It was almost a religion with Catherine to be pretty and charming, and all her sorrows could not destroy the innate desire to be in harmony with all that is beautiful and attractive—to be admired, but, above all, to be loved.

To see any one so unfortunate as to be incapable of inspiring either of these feelings, appeared to Catherine a very sad calamity.

Lavinia spoke of it herself one day, in reference to Captain Morant's desertion of his wife.

'Remember this, Catherine,' she said with severity, 'you *have been* loved. Lord Alwyn was devoted to you till he died. Your husband loved you *at first*. It seems to me you have had enough—you can live upon the memory of what has been. You should learn to be content with giving out your own affection, looking for nothing in return. Bear in

mind how many women—myself, for instance—are happy enough, without being *l'objet aimé* for any one.'

'Dear Lavinia, I have not the least strength of character—that is the plain truth—and I *can't* be content to love without return.'

'I neither give nor receive it, and yet I am not broken-hearted,' answered Lavinia. 'I look on at these things as an independent observer, and take considerable interest in my fellow-creatures;—but they don't call forth much admiration from me. We are a poor lot at the best; and, in my opinion, it is not worth the struggle to obtain the very highest devotion that one wretched fellow-sinner can give to another. For my part, recognising as I do, the impossibility of ever inspiring what you call love, I despise it altogether, and don't even wish for it. "The grapes are sour" in my case, perhaps you will say.'

‘And yet, it is so natural to care for it, you can’t convince me it is wrong,’ said Mrs Morant. ‘Lavinia, you are such an exceptional person in all your views and ways, you cannot enter into my feelings. What is the harm of wishing for my husband’s affection, and even of being indignant at his cruelty to me?’

‘Not at all as regards that last clause, my dear child; I strongly approve of it. Cultivate indignation against him by all means. Shake the very dust off the soles of your feet against him, and put him out of your mind; dismiss him from your life altogether. It is not the end of the world for you, if he does not appreciate you. Occupy yourself, improve your mind, do good to your neighbour, and forget that you ever saw or heard of Kenelm Morant, until he turns up again, which he is sure to do some day.’

‘I wish I could forget,’ Catherine replied

sadly ; ‘but he is always in my thoughts—always—night and day *haunting* me ; not any longer as the husband I once loved, but as a mysterious phantom threatening me with evil.’

‘If this is the case,’ Lavinia answered with her usual promptitude, ‘I reverse my advice, and say—Follow him, pursue him from station to station until you find him, and until you can see him face to face, and ask him for an explanation. I would be content with no half measures, Catherine. In your place, I should either sweep him out of my mind as unworthy of another thought, or I would be reconciled to him, cost what it might. You are young and strong ; what should hinder your going out to the coast of Syria to see him and question him ? It is a journey people take for pleasure every day.’

‘I did it once, Lavinia, as you know, and I

failed to find him then, when he was stationed at Malta. Now he is farther off, cruising about, it would be easier than ever for him to escape from me. I could not do it alone, and who would undertake to go with me again, on such a dreary hopeless expedition ?

‘Paul would go with you,’ Lavinia answered with decision. ‘Paul’s whole life is devoted to others. He has no existence of his own. He would take you, and watch over you as a keeper takes care of a sick animal. Paul has travelled everywhere ; he is afraid of nothing. He would go with you if you chose, and would do it gladly.’

‘You are very kind,’ Catherine said, ‘but I would rather not ; I have had humiliation enough. Perhaps news may arrive some day to explain, but I can’t undertake another journey in search of my husband. I dread some worse explanation than any that has yet

occurred to us. Pray don't speak of it any more. I cannot talk of it.'

And Lavinia, with an effort, kept silence upon the subject ; but when she found herself at home again, she told Paul of her suggestion, expecting his support in her own views, but he did not agree with them.

'I would go out alone if Mrs Morant wished it,' he said, 'but I could not bear to take her again as a suppliant to her husband, when she has done nothing wrong. She is quite right to stay at home until he behaves better.'

Lavinia was easily silenced by her brother ; he was the only person belonging to her, for whom she had an unfeigned respect and affection—and Paul deserved it. He was gentle, firm, and tender, with so rare an unselfishness, that his family could invariably rely on his doing all their disagreeable work for them. He had no profession, though he was a Fellow of

his college, but he was always at work with a definite aim before him, either at his father's country home or in London. He looked forward to a seat in Parliament, and he was learning to understand the necessities of the poor, with whom he felt an intense sympathy, hoping to plead their cause some future day.

In the world he was called 'That odd young man.' Amongst the few who knew him well, he was the friend in need, the best beloved, and the sure refuge in every difficulty. But he was shy and modest to a singular extent, and could not do himself justice in society. He had no taste for mere amusement, and lived very much alone, seeing only two or three intimate friends who understood and cared for him. Of this small number, his connections, the Aylmers were the most valued by him—he spent more of his spare time with them, than in his own home—where his father treated him with

pitying good-nature, as next door to a lunatic, and where it was painful to call forth Lavinia's well-intended championship on his behalf. There was no rest for him in his own home, but at the Aylmers' he found peace and repose, and the warmest sympathy in his plans to help his fellow-sufferers in the world. The quiet old-fashioned house and garden where they lived, used to be called Old Brompton, but is now merged in South Kensington. Here the beautiful, tall, and stately Margaret, scarcely yet eighteen, would consult him in her reading, and follow his advice in her studies and occupations, with an earnest simplicity, which had long since touched his heart ; but hitherto he had set such thoughts aside. He was not seeking his own, but the good and happiness of others, and many hours of every day were spent by him amongst the poor and the outcast in the worst parts of London, where he was greeted as a

friend by bad and good alike. 'He maketh His rain to fall on the just and on the unjust,' had not been written in vain for Paul Ogleby. He went about amongst all kinds of men, and did his best for them, giving help, support, intelligent advice, and money where it was required, asking and expecting no gratitude, but teaching others how to help themselves.

Horace Ormonde's was a very different life, and yet he also was living for others, and not entirely for himself and his own pleasure. He had thrown himself into all Catherine Morant's anxieties, and accepted them as his own. Whenever any worse account than usual had arrived from Nice, Horace had fallen into the habit of calling daily for news at Lady Wrexmore's house in Princes Gate. By degrees, whether the accounts had been good or bad, it became his rule of life to call every day upon his friends soon after breakfast, on his way to

the Temple. His lodgings were at Kensington Gore, so that he passed the house every day. His business as a lawyer was merely nominal at this time, and between eleven and twelve he always found Catherine alone, no other visitor could interfere with him ; and gradually Horace Ormonde's unfailing sympathy and his cheerful companionship began to revive Catherine's drooping spirits. She turned to him for strength and courage with which to face the sadness of her destiny—she gratefully looked upon him as her best friend. Nature had intended her to be a happy woman, but fate had marred and warped all possibility of happiness, except on that high and lofty position of self-abnegation and submission which Catherine was indeed very far from having attained. She believed herself safe in accepting the relief and comfort of Horace's friendship. To love and to be loved, had been the ideal of

her life; this ideal had been roughly thrown over, and made impossible for her. She could no longer love her husband, and with her vehement and affectionate nature, it was agony to remain unloved. Preachers from their pulpits will persistently inveigh against ‘malice and hatred and all uncharitableness;’ but they seldom touch that difficult question of too much affection—too large a charity. They attack vice in its broadest outlines, in its coarsest colours; they do not approach the great doubt which is tormenting many women’s hearts at one period or other of their lives:— ‘Am I caring too much for this friend, whose affection has become the sunshine of my life?’ They do not say, Beware of friendship—beware of sympathy—beware of self-sacrificing devotion. They keep to the strict parallel of the sheep and the goats, the right and the left hand, the tares and the wheat. But where do

they place the struggling, fainting souls who are fighting against the fatal craving for that affection—which some few—perhaps many, amongst us, happily are allowed to give and to receive, without let or hindrance in their married life?

Horace honestly did not believe there was any danger for Catherine in his intimacy with her at this time. For himself, what did it signify? he could bear to suffer anything for her sake. He was, indeed, thoroughly impressed with the conviction that she was still tenderly attached to her husband, in spite of his persistent neglect and forgetfulness.

There was a weary grace, a sweet sadness, which pervaded Catherine's whole being at this time, which called forth interest and sympathy quite unconsciously to herself. Her nature was to love a very few people with strong affection. She cared little for acquaint-

ances. Her husband, her mother, and her brother had almost entirely occupied her thoughts, until her friendship with Horace had begun, and by degrees this had become the most absorbing interest of her life. She took refuge in his sympathy and kindness, from the painful thoughts which crowded upon her whenever she remembered Kenelm's alienation from her. Horace appeared to her as a second brother, and as another son to Lady Wrexmore. He was sympathetic and considerate to them both. He carefully devised occupations and amusements for the Dowager and her daughter, which should not jar upon them by too great a contrast with their melancholy position, and yet which might divert their thoughts from dwelling too much upon it.

Sometimes the Scudamores were glad of an evening to themselves ; they would go out to the play, or to dine with their own friends ;

on these occasions it became a custom for Horace to read aloud to Lady Wrexmore and her daughter in their quiet sitting-room upstairs.

One evening he brought Jean Paul's 'Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces' with him to Princes Gate, and finding Catherine alone with her mother, he read aloud to them some of the second part of that exquisitely pathetic story. Catherine had already read the first volume of it, but she had scarcely entered into all its depth of feeling, until this evening when Horace read it aloud. It is the history of an ill-assorted marriage—and perhaps it was not well chosen as a study for Mrs Morant.

Horace had reached the passage where Siebenkäs leans his head upon the window-sill, and by chance touches the handkerchief Lenette has left there, which is moist and cold with tears. 'The mortified one had solaced herself

after the long weary pressure of a whole day with this wild effusion—as we are bled after severe contusions. On touching the handkerchief, an icy shudder passed down his back, like a pang of conscience, but was immediately succeeded by a hot burning glow, when the thought occurred that she had wept over the loss of a very different person from himself.’ Some street musicians are playing.

‘The voice and the flute now began again, but without the harp—and both mingled in a slow song, every verse of which concluded with the words “Gone is gone, dead is dead!” Sorrow seized him, like the cloak-fish, in its dark suffocating folds. He pressed Lenette’s wet handkerchief hard against his eyeballs, and only darkly heard, “Gone is gone, dead is dead!”’

As Horace finished this passage, his voice failed him; he saw Catherine was in tears—

he himself broke down, and ashamed of his emotion, he suddenly stooped down and affected to be looking for something under the table. He could read no more—and after a few minutes' pause, Lady Wrexmore was the only one of them who was able to speak.

'It is a strange eccentric story,' she said with a sigh, as she quietly continued her knitting; 'I think it is rather too depressing to bear reading out aloud.'

'Yes,' Horace answered, 'it was not well chosen.' His eyes met Catherine's as he spoke, and he could not help adding, 'I am sorry I read it to you—I had forgotten how pathetic it is.'

Catherine could not answer, but she smiled through her tears, and Horace silently shook hands, and went away.

That evening, as Mrs Morant undressed herself in her own room, a little scene unceasingly

was present to her mind. It was that of the first evening that she had met her husband—the rising ground on which he had stood beside Mr Orde, in the light of the setting sun, and the children's voices were singing—

‘If some poor wandering child of Thine
Have spurned to-day the voice divine,
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin,
Let him no more lie down in sin.’

Catherine threw herself on her knees and prayed. Her heart had become alienated from her husband. She could not blame herself for this; even her brother, good and high-minded as he was, had urged upon her to ‘try and forget;’ but he did not know the danger, to one of his sister's affectionate heart, of leaving that place forsaken where once she had cherished the memory of her husband.

‘Oh! let me never—never lie down in sin!’ Catherine cried in anguish of spirit—for she had discovered that she loved Horace Ormonde.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONTAGU SQUARE.

CAPTAIN MORANT was, of course, never mentioned by any of the family in Catherine's presence, and she seldom spoke of him now, even to her mother and sisters ; only when letters arrived from the *Sappho* to Mr Scudamore, she was ready to listen to whatever news he had to give—but she had lost all hope. Her husband's conduct had been too cruel to allow any prospect of reconciliation. If he was mad, she could pity him with all her heart ; but it appeared that he showed no other sign of madness, and all the duties of his profession were performed as regularly as ever. One morning, when a letter had been received from Dr

Yates, Catherine was reading it over, when Horace paid her his usual morning visit, and this was the first time that she spoke of her husband to Mr Ormonde.

‘Will you read this letter, and tell me what you think of it?’ Catherine said. ‘It is from Dr Yates; mamma has told you, of course, who he is.’

Horace took the letter, written in the surgeon’s clear business-like hand, and read—

‘I am sorry to say there is no change to report upon the one subject you are interested in. The Captain avoids me as much as he can, as though he connects me with something painful. He is too just a man to be rude to me, but he scarcely ever asks me to dine—this he used to do very often—and if I try to get into conversation with him, he is glad to shake me off as soon as he can. Yesterday, however, he chanced to cut his hand rather badly

with some broken glass. I kept aloof and took no notice, till he sent for me to probe the cut ; there was some glass in it, which I had to take out. It was rather a troublesome operation in its way, and though he is not a man to flinch at a trifle, I saw he was faint, and gave him some brandy. All at once his old friendly tone came back, and he said—

“ Yates, there is something wrong with me. At times I find myself trying to remember things which *won't* come back, try as I may. I hope my reason is not failing me. 'There is something wrong here,' he said, and he held his hand to his forehead.

‘I felt this might be a propitious moment for getting in a word about that poor lady, his wife—so I said, as cheerfully as I could—

“ You are all right, sir, with all of us on board ship. You are as smart an officer as you ever were.”

‘He gave a sigh of relief, as I thought, and answered me—

“I am glad you can say that. You would not humbug me, I know, my dear Yates ; and yet, something has gone—I can’t tell what.”

“You never seem to think of your wife, sir,” I said, “and she is very unhappy about it.”

“Unhappy is she ? poor lady !” he said—and with a scornful laugh he added, “My dear fellow, that is *your* screw loose. You think I am married—nothing of the kind—you are under a delusion.”

“Will you read your wife’s letters, sir ?” I said, for the three last packets that you forwarded, he has returned to me unopened.

“I have told you, Dr Yates, that I have no wife,” he answered, drawing himself up as stiffly as ever. And since this day—a week ago—he has resumed all his curt ways with me. I am very much perplexed, because it is clearly not

madness, in the common sense of the word ; but I conclude it is some form of monomania with which I am not acquainted, and you had better consult some *specialist* about the condition of his brain. It is beyond my poor skill to fathom it. The Captain is otherwise in good health, fairly cheerful, and full of his work.'

'You see, nothing can be done till he comes home,' Catherine said as Horace finished reading this letter. 'We have consulted Dr Sutherland and other doctors also, but they all say that unless they can see him and talk to him, they will not give any definite opinion about his condition.'

'Meantime it is killing you,' Horace said with great emotion. 'Have you ever tried his uncle's influence—the Admiral Morant of whom your mother speaks ?'

'No,' Catherine answered with some hesitation. 'He opposed Kenelm's marriage, and wrote

me a very harsh, disagreeable letter, accusing me of "hindering his nephew from following out his high career." Kenelm read it, and said he could not quarrel with his uncle ; that he had promised to make him his heir if he kept to his profession—and I saw it was a great object with my husband to keep on good terms with him. For this reason I have always tried to prevent the Admiral's knowing how miserable our marriage has been. But I believe Wrexmore wrote to him.'

Horace was touched to see that Catherine shrank from injuring Kenelm in his uncle's esteem. She was persuaded that her own life was absolutely severed from her husband's, and that no worldly loss or discredit that could fall upon him would now affect her ; but she was too forgiving to do any one, even her enemy, an ill turn ; still less could she act unkindly towards the man whom she had once

loved well enough to marry. But it was worth while to find out if the Admiral would interfere in Catherine's behalf.

‘Indeed you had better go and see him yourself,’ Horace advised. ‘It will be very unnatural if *you* cannot touch him. Go to him yourself, dear Mrs Morant, and ask him to write for you to his nephew—to take your cause into his own hands. The Admiral must be affected by your forgiving gentleness—and by your evident devotion to your husband. I am sure it is worth trying, at all events.’

Horace had brought out these words with some difficulty—it gave him a sharp pang whenever he remembered that Catherine's whole life was bound up in that of another man; but he was resolved loyally to help her to be reconciled to him, though he knew that if he succeeded, she would no longer be to

him the sweet friend and sister that he still tried hard to consider her.

Mrs Morant followed Horace Ormonde's advice. She had never seen Admiral Morant. She believed him to be prejudiced against her ; and, worse than all, she was dimly conscious that she no longer unreservedly wished for a reconciliation. Still it was right to seek it ; and however weak and mistaken she might have been, she still clung to the life-buoy of duty, and knew that it was her one hope of salvation.

Catherine drove to the Admiral's house in Montagu Square early that same afternoon. She had agreed with Horace that this was the most likely time to find him at home. Her voice trembled as she gave her name to the servant, 'Mrs Kenelm Morant;' and as she followed him upstairs, her heart beat so violently, that she stopped for an instant to recover herself. As she heard her name an-

nounced, she heard also Admiral Morant repeating it in surprise. 'Who?—who is it?' he asked. A sharp-toned lady's voice answered him, 'It is Mrs Kenelm,' with the comment, 'Strange, indeed!' Catherine had forgotten that a maiden sister of Admiral Morant's lived with him. She had not thought of it in time to ask a private interview.

Three is proverbially a fatal number to an interview of any importance. A *tête-à-tête* is so essential, that it required all the courage Catherine possessed to go into the room and face her enemies. The Admiral shook hands with her with formal civility, and gave her a chair, but there was as much sulkiness in his demeanour as any gentleman could allow himself to exhibit. He was a man of seventy, with venerable white hair, and a confirmed stoop in the shoulders, but his clear blue eyes and the manly tone of his voice, recalled his

nephew's image. Catherine courteously turned from the Admiral to his sister, involuntarily offering to shake hands also with her, but Miss Morant folded her hands together, and curtseyed stiffly, saying, as she remained standing, with the utmost formality—‘May I ask to what are we indebted for the honour of this visit?’

‘There is no question of conferring or receiving honour on either side, between relations,’ Catherine answered, with more spirit in her tone than she could have commanded if she had been more kindly received; and turning to the Admiral, with the instinct of a woman accustomed to homage and attention, she said abruptly, ‘Do you know—can you tell me why my husband does not write to me? Is it your wish—is it your doing,’ she continued with heightening colour, ‘that he no longer cares for me? You disapproved his marrying me—

what have I done to deserve this continued persecution ? ’

‘ God only knows,’ the Admiral replied with an uneasy glance at his sister. ‘ Something is wrong, no doubt ; and what it is, you and Kenelm can only explain or not—as you choose. It is no affair of mine.’

‘ It is no affair of ours,’ Miss Morant more viciously repeated ; ‘ but knowing our nephew so intimately as we do, I must plainly tell you we entirely exonerate him from all blame—we have no doubt whatever that he has some *very good reason* for acting as he has done.’

Catherine would not condescend to answer this unfeeling assertion ; she turned towards the Admiral with quiet dignity, and said, ‘ You are a gentleman, sir. You will not insult the unfortunate. Let me tell you, that however badly you may think of me, Kenelm loved me once. We parted at Wrexmore in the greatest dis-

tress, only two hours before he sailed. He wrote to me from Gibraltar—now a whole year ago—a most affectionate letter, sending me a journal he had kept for me during the passage; and that is the last time that I have heard from him. He was just going on board the *Sappho* when he posted his letter; in an hour's time, he said, he should be on board. I have often bitterly regretted that I did not insist on going to Gibraltar with him, but he would not allow it; he thought it would be so dreary for me to come back alone; and another reason against it was, that he was sure it would vex you; he said you would thoroughly disapprove of my going with him.'

'He was right there, my dear,' the Admiral answered, forgetting to be stiff with her for an instant. 'Kenelm had no business to marry in such a hurry. He had only just been made post-captain—a glorious step for him at twenty-

seven ; and instead of giving all his mind to his ship, and marrying *her* for the best years of his life, he must needs be led away by a pretty face, and marry straight off after three weeks' courtship.'

'It was a most precipitate and ill-judged affair,' Miss Morant chimed in, 'and so he now finds it.'

'Does he tell you so, sir?' Catherine said, still addressing herself wholly to the Admiral.

'I assure you, Mrs Kenelm, he never mentions your name, although he writes to us by every mail,' added his sister.

'Can you give me no explanation of his cruelty to me, sir?' Catherine said, now getting angry. 'Is it a family habit, that you—both of you take it so coolly?'

The Admiral was rubbing his knees in a dissatisfied manner, and after a moment's pause, to Catherine's relief, he said to his sister,

‘Agatha, I think you had best leave me to say a few words alone to Mrs Kenelm.’

Miss Morant at once left the room, but an angry flush suffused her countenance.

When they were left together, however, the Admiral still continued to rub his knees in an absent manner without speaking, and Catherine ventured to say, ‘Thank you, sir, for allowing me to speak to you alone. I see that Miss Morant is prejudiced even more against me than you are ; and it is hard work to plead for myself in the face of two such bitter adversaries.’

‘My dear child,’ the Admiral said, ‘now that I see you for myself, I am very sorry for you. I was only angry with you before, but I am sorry for you now—upon my soul I am !’

‘Then you will try to help me ?’ Catherine continued more gently than before. ‘Kenelm

used always to tell me that you have been a second father to him—he owes everything to you—and I believe, until he married me, he never disobliged you in all his life, or failed in duty towards you. Would he refuse to obey you now, do you think, if you were to write, or telegraph to him, that you desire him to explain why he has never answered my letters, nor taken any notice of me for more than a year? We have had no quarrel, sir ; even now I have never yet written an unkind word to him. I am sure he is under some dreadful mistake—or some *delusion*,' she added with hesitation.

‘He is no more mad than I am,’ the Admiral answered rather sharply. ‘No, no ; there is no blinking the fact, my dear Mrs Kenelm, that he married you in too great a hurry, without allowing himself time to find out all that had gone on, before he fell in love with you. He has found it out since, as we sup-

pose—my sister and I—and he can't get over it.'

Catherine's large brown eyes dilated as she looked sternly at the old man, and asked, 'What had gone on before, sir? what do you mean? I don't understand you.'

Admiral Morant shuffled uneasily in his chair, averted his eyes from Catherine's severe glance, and answered almost humbly, 'It is all conjecture, but what we mean is, that perhaps Kenelm did not like to hear that you were engaged to your handsome young cousin, Lord Alwyn, at one time—and since then'——

Catherine had risen from her seat, and stood still, straight, and rigid. 'And since then?' she repeated in a calm tone of inquiry, although she felt a dim prevision of what was coming.

'Since then,' the Admiral continued, also leaving his chair, and going off to the other end

of the room, where he gained a moment's time by poking the fire and throwing up the ashes.

‘Will you go on, if you please?’ Catherine now said with exceeding haughtiness.

‘Well, we hear all the ins and outs from one source or another. It may be only ill-natured gossip perhaps; but it is said that you have a lover again now—a Mr Ormonde—who is every day at your house—and I don't think Kenelm would like that.’

Catherine remained perfectly calm, and with the self-control of one who is in a highly-wrought condition, she answered—‘With regard to my cousin, Lord Alwyn, he was brought up as one of our own family; we looked on each other as brother and sister until he died, and in dying he spoke of his attachment to me. It is profanity to discuss it with you. Kenelm knew all there was to tell about my cousin.’

‘Ah, well! may be, may be! I hope you speak the truth, my dear; but ill-natured things are said; and this last attack against you about Mr Ormonde, can’t be so easily parried, I am afraid.’

Catherine coloured vividly for an instant. She was wild with horror of the Admiral—of the world—of her husband too, perhaps. Her head swam dizzily for an instant, and she caught hold of the back of a chair to support herself.

‘Sit down, sit down, my poor lady!’ the Admiral said, shoving forward his own easy-chair. ‘I have been too rough with you. Don’t let us talk any more about it. It’s a bad business—a bad business! and I see no way out of it.’

‘Let me say one word, before I leave this house,’ Catherine said. ‘Mr Ormonde, of whom you spoke just now, is my brother’s friend; my mother approves of his visits; and I think

what is sanctioned by her, need not expose me to such insulting language from you.'

She could say no more, and without another word, she left the room, and hurried downstairs ; but as she passed the dining-room door, she saw that it stood ajar, and Miss Morant emerged from it, suddenly facing Catherine, and saying in a hoarse whisper—

'Now you know what we all think. No man of honour deserts his wife without a cause, and it is quite clear to us that there must be a cause ; Kenelm will explain all when he returns.' Then seizing Catherine's arm with a wiry grasp, she said, 'Come into this room, Mrs Morant, and let me show you your husband's picture ;' and throwing the dining-room door wide open, Miss Morant waved her hand towards the picture of her nephew.

It was an oil-painting of him as a young

lieutenant in his naval uniform. The careless look of manly daring, which Catherine so well remembered, was there—the light waving hair, the bold blue eyes, and the sweet smile which redeemed the face from sternness. The vividness of the likeness struck Catherine most forcibly. She no longer felt the pressure of Miss Morant's thin fingers on her arm ; she no longer thought of the Admiral's cruel charges against her—she had even forgotten Horace Ormonde. She only saw her estranged husband once more before her—noble, charming, and true, as she had known him in early days ; and she cried out in a tone of anguish, which even Miss Morant felt was sincere—

‘O Kenelm ! what have I done to deserve such cruelty from you ? Let me go,’ she added, passionately breaking loose from Miss Morant's firm grasp. ‘Let me go away ! You are all cruel, all heartless, each one of you ! It is more

than I can endure ;' and she was leaving the room, but Miss Morant detained her again, although Catherine was now crying bitterly.

' You say we are all heartless,' she cried, trembling with agitation, ' because we do not feel for you—a stranger, a mere fine lady, who has blighted our nephew's life. Look at him there, Mrs Morant—look at him, bright and happy, and full of hope and energy, as he was before he knew you ; and think of him as he is now—subdued, depressed, reserved, but still true as steel to his duty, thank God ! He will not come home, he will not flinch from his work ; but he tells us there is a blight upon his life, and that he no longer takes any interest or pleasure in his profession. Who has wrought this change in him ? Who has marred and ruined the happiness of his life ? Who is to blame if not yourself ?'

By this time Admiral Morant had followed

Catherine downstairs. He was already softened towards her, and he came forward and gave her his arm, saying to his sister—

‘I am sorry you have detained Mrs Kenelm, Agatha. We don’t know who is to blame, and it is not fair to prejudge any one unheard. If you will write out your own version of your disagreement with Kenelm, my dear, and let us read it, I will see what can be done to bring about a reconciliation, or at least a better understanding between you. Since he has married you, it is for better for worse ; and as long as you keep good and faithful to him now, I don’t see that he is justified in taking no further notice of you. Whatever may have occurred to shake his faith in you, he ought to explain it, to give you a chance of clearing yourself. But don’t flirt, my dear ; don’t see so much of this Mr Ormonde. Mark my words, such friendships are dangerous.’

Admiral Morant said these few words in the passage, as he took Catherine to the carriage. No bell had been rung, and no servants were in the way. The Admiral opened the street door himself, and, with an instinct of compassion, offered to shake hands with Catherine as he put her into the carriage. For an instant she hesitated what to do, then yielding to the usual impulsiveness of her character, she gave him her hand, saying hurriedly, and in a low tremulous voice—

‘We may never meet again—indeed, I hope we never shall. You have cruelly wounded and insulted me; but though I am angry now, I forgive you—I forgive your sister also—will you tell her so?—but still I wish, with all my heart, that I had never entered this house; it has made *everything* worse than ever.’ And yet the kind little Catherine faintly smiled through her tears, and gave a courteous farewell bow to the old Admiral, as she drove away.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW FACE.

HORACE found it impossible to attend to anything else whilst Mrs Morant was going through so critical an interview with her husband's relations. He rode drearily up and down the Park, hoping to meet the carriage returning from Montagu Square. His heart was full of sympathy and anxiety for Catherine. If she should be repelled by the Admiral and his sister, it would throw her more than ever upon him, his friendship and tenderness would be her only consolation. But if she was well received and kindly dealt with, it was possible that a reconciliation with her husband would ensue ; and Horace felt that a crisis in his life

was approaching. As he rode slowly and abstractedly to and from the Marble Arch to Hyde Park Gate, he was startled from his moodiness by a sudden commotion in the Park. A young girl dashed past him on a runaway horse ; her danger was increased, as usual, by the injudicious pursuit of a number of other riders, some of them calling out to her to 'keep her seat,' 'give him his head,' and so on. The horse was only more and more excited by the clatter behind him, and suddenly left the ride and tore across the grass towards the Serpentine. Horace made for the same point by the road, galloping at full speed ; and as he dismounted, he was in time to meet the girl and to stop her horse. At the same moment another young man, whom Horace recognised as Paul Ogleby, who had also been in pursuit, ran forward, and holding the horse's bridle, exclaimed cheerfully, in a brotherly tone—

‘Well done, Margaret! You have kept your seat beautifully. You are not hurt or fainting or anything, are you?’

‘No,’ she answered with a smile, but rather gasping as she spoke, ‘only my arm is half pulled off;’ and then observing the crowd which surrounded her, she added in an under voice to Mr Ogleby,—‘Let us go home, Paul; I can’t stay in this crowd waiting for your father. Where is he?’

‘You shall not remain on that beast,’ Paul said, ‘if I can prevent it.’

By this time Sir Philip Ogleby had joined them. He was a man of military bearing, with a calm and dignified demeanour; and after a few words of solicitude and inquiry, he assented to Margaret’s remaining on horseback, explaining gravely to Paul that it was an accident—the upsetting of a cart—which had startled the horse and set him off. ‘There is

no vice in him' he continued, 'and Margaret had better ride quietly home with us at once. If she gives way now, she will lose her nerve, and never be able to ride again,' Sir Philip said.

Paul expostulated still; but Margaret patted the horse's neck, and gently took the bridle from him, laughing at his hesitation, and telling him to remount his own horse without more delay.

Her voice was clear and sweet as a child's. There was no touch of Diana-Vernon daring in her demeanour—but a quiet self-possession, which, however, Horace saw was kept up by an effort. The truth was, that she felt rather nervous, but she was resolved to conquer her fears; and as she rode slowly away with Paul and his father, Horace thought he had never seen a more graceful figure or a more lovely countenance. Her colouring was wonderfully

brilliant, and her eyes flashed with that sapphire light which is seldom seen after very early youth.

Horace had lingered in the crowd for a few minutes, attracted by the great beauty of this girl, and by the sweetness and charm of her voice and manner. He felt vaguely disappointed that she had not observed it was he who had stopped her horse. She had not once looked at him ; her thanks had been given to Paul, who had arrived indeed only an instant later than Horace, and who had evidently not thought of anything else but Margaret's safety when he reached her. As Horace remounted his horse, an acquaintance joined him, saying, 'What a beautiful girl that is, Ormonde !—you know her, of course ?'

'Who is she ?' Horace asked ; 'I never saw her before.'

'She is Miss Aylmer, half-sister to Lady

Wrexmore. They say she is to marry her cousin, Paul Ogleby—he is always riding with her. I thought you knew all the Wrexmores.’

‘ I know Wrexmore,’ Horace answered gravely ; ‘ he is one of my greatest friends.’

‘ Ah, indeed—poor fellow ! he is in Italy—not likely to live, is he ? ’

‘ No ; he is doomed and dying,’ Horace said ; and Catherine’s carriage drove past at that moment. She looked up and bowed slightly to Horace—without the faintest smile, and with a dreary absent expression, which struck even his friend.

‘ Is not that Wrexmore’s youngest sister ? ’ he said, turning to Horace. ‘ She is separated from her husband, is she not ? What was the reason of it—and what is the matter with her ? She looks wretched, poor thing ! and two years ago, she was one of the handsomest and sweetest women I ever knew.’

Horace could not speak for an instant ; his lips felt stiff and frozen when he tried to frame some commonplace answer to his friend.

‘ Her husband is at sea,’ at last he replied, as carelessly as he could ; ‘ there is an inevitable separation between naval men and their wives, but it does not last for ever.’

Horace’s acquaintance was too discreet, and too much a man of the world, to pursue the subject any further. He observed that Horace was not in good spirits, and that he spoke with evident effort, when Mrs Morant was mentioned ; and waving his hand in good-humoured adieu, he put his horse into a brisk trot, and left Horace to himself. Horace had felt a pang of self-reproach, as he caught sight of Catherine’s wan face. For several months he had been wholly and entirely devoted to her. He had many friends—he was popular, esteemed, and sought after. He had neglected everything

else, and given up every spare hour of his life to Catherine Morant. The last thought at night, the first recollection in the morning, had been that pensive young face. The gracious sweetness of her manner, the lighting up of her countenance when he appeared—was all his reward. He had never asked for a word of affection from her ; he had always resolutely faced the stern fact of her marriage, as an insurmountable barrier between them for ever ; but he knew well enough that it was not friendship alone, which had led him to throw in his lot with hers—to make her people his people and her God his God. To-day, for the first time for many, many weeks, he had for an instant forgotten Catherine—with all the sadness and perplexity of her life. He had been vividly struck with genuine admiration for another woman ; and it came to him as a flash of surprise—as a respite from the habitual tension of

his feelings, in a direction which he well knew could have no happy end.

‘What is the use of the sacrifice of my life?—how will this end?’ he asked himself, whilst Margaret’s nobleness of demeanour still dwelt on his mind. ‘Why may I not admire another woman? What wrong am I doing? And if I could break away from Mrs Morant altogether, would it not be the wisest thing I could do—even for her own sake? If I could but see her happy—I would leave her, before it is too late.’

It came as a relief to him to find it was possible—even for a few minutes, to take an interest in any one but Catherine. It was like a draught of fresh air, after a long confinement in a suffocating hothouse atmosphere.

Mrs Morant married, unhappy, surrounded by mystery and anxiety, had called forth all the tenderness of his nature. He had begun his intimacy with the most loyal desire to pro-

tect and console her, as simply as if she had been a child in distress. By degrees she had become the absorbing passion of his life; but as long as he could conceal the state of his own heart from her, he justified himself in continuing to see her. Her need of sympathy and support, in her unhappy position, made it appear like the fulfilment of a duty to devote himself to her, and an act of revolt to allow another woman to occupy his thoughts, even for a moment. The sight of this bright and happy young girl, with the beautiful innocence and openness of her countenance, and the careless ease of her manner—her rescue from danger, and the self-control of which she had given proof, interested and attracted Horace in spite of his chivalrous devotion to Mrs Morant. He found himself repeating with *some vague* sense of a possible adaptation—

“Ah, simple heart and sweet !
You loved me, damsel, surely with a love
Far tenderer than my queen’s.”

What right had Horace Ormonde to these speculations ?

Before he had reached Princes Gate, however, Margaret Aylmer’s sweet vision had faded from his mind—and the one paramount interest of his life, at this time, had resumed its command over him—even more strenuously, indeed, than before this momentary forgetfulness, for which he already reproached himself.

“ And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.”

CHAPTER XV.

AGREEABLE PEOPLE.

MARGARET AYLMER quietly rode home at a foot's pace, with Sir Philip and his son on either side of her.

‘It was you who stopped me, Paul,’ she said to her cousin, ‘and I never thanked you.’

‘No, it was Horace Ormonde who caught the horse,’ Paul answered; ‘though I came up almost at the same moment, he was too quick for me.’

‘Horace Ormonde!’ Margaret said; ‘why do I always hear his name, and always miss seeing him? I did not see him to-day, I don’t even know him by sight, and yet I have

heard of him for years. What is he like, Paul ? Lavinia cannot bear him.'

'I don't care much for him,' Paul replied. 'He is a pleasant fellow enough, but he is shallow. He does not seem to take life earnestly, or to have any definite aim ; but I have heard he will take no end of trouble for his friends, to do him justice.'

Here Sir Philip interposed—'Horace Ormonde is one of the most agreeable companions I know. He is full of accomplishment. He rides across country in first-rate style, he draws and paints with more than amateur ability, he can talk modern languages admirably, he writes charming articles ; and all this time he is steadily preparing for the Bar, although I understand he has private fortune enough to dispense with a profession, if he chose to be free. What more do you want in a young man, but to be steady and irreproach-

able in his conduct—a good son and a good friend? We want such men, Paul, to leaven society. You and Lavinia, with your high-flown aspirations, desert your proper position in the world, and persuade yourselves that you can't be wrong as long as you are working for the poor. The rich want regenerating, and are as much in need of missionaries as the poor, in my opinion.'

'My dear father,' Paul answered laughing, 'you don't mean to say that Ormonde holds his place in society in the spirit of a missionary, or with any higher object than the rest of us, to amuse ourselves?'

'I wish you and your sister brought that spirit with you into society,' his father replied with some gravity. 'You both of you agree that it bores you to go out; you indulge your own morbid views of doing right, by looking after your model-lodging-house building schemes, and

the Lord knows what else; and come back to dinner unable to discuss the news of the day, or to add to the social enjoyment of others; and if you are doing good by your Quixotic schemes, you are rendering goodness repulsive by showing how dull it has made you.'

Paul took this attack with perfect good-humour, only answering—'I daresay you are right. I wish I could take a leaf out of Ormonde's book, and be more available at your dinner-parties. But I don't think you can say that Lavinia is dull.'

'She exerts herself more than you do, and has plenty of conversation, I grant you,' Sir Philip said; 'but she is not by any means an agreeable woman.'

Here Margaret felt bound to speak.

'Poor Lavinia!' she said; 'I am sure she is much better than agreeable. She is noble, and true, and high-minded. Sir Philip, you must

value great qualities like these, more than the mere art of pleasing in society, which is only a kind of trick, which any one can acquire who likes to take the trouble.'

'I wish Lavinia would take that trouble,' Sir Philip answered good-humouredly. 'Paul is not quite so contentious nor so overbearing as his sister, but he does not talk at all, whilst Lavinia usually talks disagreeably; in fact, I am very unfortunate in my children,' he added with a sort of relenting laugh.

'But I think Paul could easily learn to talk quite agreeably,' Margaret answered playfully. 'I shall take you in hand, Paul, and give you lessons.'

Paul's honest face beamed a silent response; and as he helped Margaret to dismount at her own door, he asked—'Do you think I may come back and dine with you? They don't want me at home to-day—they all dine out.'

‘Oh, then of course you must come to us!’ Margaret answered; ‘only be punctual. You know papa was very much displeased on Sunday, when you were so late.’

The same day at dinner, Margaret reverted to their conversation with Sir Philip, on the duty of being agreeable. Her mother, although she was still handsome, and particularly gracious and amiable in her manner, had a curious want of self-confidence in her character, and took rather a morbid view of the question.

‘One can only hope to please, or not to displease, a few congenial minds,’ she was beginning, when Mr Aylmer interposed with his usual ready good-humour—

‘It is very fortunate for me, my dear, that you don’t know your own power,’ he said. ‘I should like to know to whom you have ever been displeasing in your life? The only fault I find with you is, that you won’t assert your-

self, and enter more into general conversation.'

'You take it all into your own hands, papa,' Margaret laughingly said. 'When you are not in the room, mamma talks a great deal.'

'I only do it on principle,' Mrs Aylmer said. 'It is infinitely pleasanter to me to leave it to your father, who really understands how to make himself agreeable.'

Mr Aylmer looked pleased. He rather piqued himself on being a good talker, and at the same time on knowing how to avoid becoming a bore.

'Young Ormonde is one of the most agreeable men I know,' Mr Aylmer said, by way of giving the conversation a less personal direction. 'Don't you agree with me, Helen?'

'Oh, yes! he is charming—and so sympathetic!' Mrs Aylmer replied.

'Mr Ormonde is one of those mysterious

people whom I am continually hearing about, but never meet,' Margaret said. 'He is always quoted to me as a sort of type of perfection. You know him, Paul—why can't you bring him here some day?'

'I don't think he is the sort of man to be *brought* anywhere,' Paul replied. 'He is a very good fellow—clever and pleasant and handsome; but I don't care much for him, as I have told you before. He is too finished—too conventional, perhaps, for me to get on well with him.'

'My dear Paul!' cried Mrs Aylmer, 'for once I must differ from you most emphatically. Mr Ormonde seems to me the easiest, simplest of men. I don't know him very well; but I have often sat next him at dinner, and always found him so easy to get on with. There is a peculiar sort of deference in his manner to all women, which is very attractive.'

‘I can’t bear to hear a man alter his manner directly he speaks to me,’ Margaret said, ‘as if I were an inferior creature, to whose weakness he is adapting himself. I know you rather like it, mamma, but it always gives me an impression of falseness.’

Paul was very happy as Margaret said this. He knew he had none of those arts of pleasing which Mrs Aylmer seemed to approve. His yea was yea, and his nay was nay, to men and women alike ; but no one possessed a more chivalrous soul ; and though he was unconscious of it himself, there was an attraction of its own in the fearless honesty with which he tried to express exactly what was in his mind. If he could not, out of consideration for others, say what he thought, he knew how to remain silent, without giving offence.

‘What do you consider the great charm in Mr Ormonde, papa ?’ now asked Margaret.

‘He is a good listener, to begin with,’ her father replied; ‘and when he has paid you the compliment of showing that he takes an interest in what you have to say, he is able at any moment to talk agreeably, and with thorough understanding, upon any subject you like to choose—politics, art, history, education, social questions, literature—there is nothing you like to start to which he will not respond. He is always armed *cap-à-pie*.

‘I don’t think that is exactly my idea of an agreeable man, papa,’ Margaret said. ‘I like more distinct individuality in my friends. It would never bore me for any one to talk on their own hobby. What I like to see is some flash of interest and real feeling in what is said, instead of dreary commonplace phraseology.’

‘What I care for is sympathy,’ Mrs Aylmer said, ‘more than anything else; and that, I think, is Mr Ormonde’s special characteristic.

We stayed in the house with him at Wrexmore, three or four years ago, as you remember, Henry ; and he and I often had long conversations together. He came here two or three times after that visit ; but you were in the schoolroom then, Margaret, and I suppose you did not see him. Since then his father died, and I have never met him anywhere at all, except once or twice at Princes Gate.'

'Of course I don't feel qualified to speak about agreeable people,' Paul now began ; 'but I think, on the whole, I agree with Mrs Aylmer, that I like people to talk to each person differently, without consciously adapting themselves, but because they recognise one's individuality. I suppose this is what you mean by sympathy ?'

'Yes,' Mrs Aylmer said ; 'I call this being sympathetic, and that is what I like so much in Mr Ormonde.'

‘There is quite another class of agreeable people whom we have all overlooked,’ said Mr Aylmer, ‘who carry their own atmosphere, as it were, with them wherever they go. They come in upon you thoroughly absorbed in their own topics, their own interests ; and if they know how to handle them pleasantly, it is like change of air, or a visit to a country-house ; you are lifted into a new scene, and it refreshes and rests you immensely.’

‘If the new scene is an elevating one,’ Mrs Aylmer observed ; ‘but I can’t say I care to be lifted by force, out of my own groove of thought into a worse one.’

‘I think I rather like egotism in my friends,’ Margaret said ; ‘one is so glad to be trusted with knowing what is really behind the veil—to be allowed to penetrate below the surface.’

‘And yet how reserved you are yourself!’ Paul said ; but the next moment he regretted

what he had said, for he saw that Margaret did not like it.

‘This is my want of sympathy,’ I suppose, he thought to himself. ‘How can I learn to understand—and to make myself agreeable to her?’

After a moment’s pause, Margaret turned round to her mother, and said—‘Mamma, will you ask Mr Ormonde to dinner? He stopped my horse to-day, though Paul would have done it a moment after,’ she said good-naturedly; ‘but still, in common gratitude, we ought to invite him here; and I want very much to see what your idea of perfection is like.’

They had finished dinner, and, according to their custom in fine weather, Mrs Aylmer opened the dining-room window, and went down the stone steps which led into the garden, followed by Margaret.

Paul soon joined them there. He had learned to look on their house as his real home, and to

spend all his spare hours there. As he sat down on one of the garden-chairs on the lawn beside them, Margaret said—‘How glad I am that you are my cousin, and that I know all about you, Paul! It is very exciting to try and find out what is in people, but it is much pleasanter to know it all without any trouble. There is a calm repose in talking to you—is there not, mamma? We have no curiosity about you, nothing to explore—no startling discoveries or sudden surprises, and a quiet understanding about everything. Certainly there is a great comfort in having relations.’

‘But we are not in the least related,’ Paul answered rather eagerly. ‘I always regret that we were ever encouraged to call each other cousins,’ he said with a sudden impatience which hurt and surprised Margaret.

‘How cross you are, Paul! What is the matter with you? You are papa’s nephew, and there-

fore I call you my cousin, and always mean to do so,' she added, with a light-hearted smile, which gave more pain to her words.

Paul abruptly took leave the next moment, without pursuing the subject. He wished Mrs Aylmer good evening—pleading he had an engagement at home; then shaking hands with Margaret, he wrenched her hand so tightly that a ring she wore almost cut her fingers, saying in a low voice—'Perhaps some day you will be sorry for all the cruel things you say to me now. But I never wish you to be half as wretched as you make me,'—and he went away.

'Paul is very odd to-night,' Margaret observed to her mother. 'I think he disliked my saying I wanted to know Mr Ormonde. What can it signify to him? He could never take Paul's place, or clash with him in any way.'

'Margaret,' her mother answered in her

most sympathising tone, 'do you know, I am sometimes afraid that Paul is in love with you.'

Margaret coloured, not with pleasure, but with annoyance, saying — 'You are always imagining such things, mamma. Paul is my brother simply, and he has a dog-in-the-manger dislike or dread of seeing himself supplanted ; but he is not so absurd as to have the least touch of romance for me ;' and as her father came out into the garden to smoke a pipe, she went to meet him, whilst Mrs Aylmer sat still and pondered over poor dear Paul's state of mind.

'His is not a weak nature, that will break down under a trial of this kind. He will get over all this pain ; but I do wish,' she said to herself, 'I wish Margaret would learn to care for him. He is very kind and good, and she knows him so well, I could trust him entirely.'

What a pity she is so indifferent, so cold about him !’

Margaret now brought her mother a cup of coffee, and kissed her as she gave it to her. She was conscious she had shown impatience at the suggestion about Paul, and was anxious to make amends, as she said—‘ I am afraid I was very cross just now, mamma ; but it would make me hate Paul so dreadfully if I thought what you said was true ; and as it is, I am always so happy with him. You won’t say it or think it again, will you, dear ? ’

‘ I will do my best,’ her mother answered ; ‘ but I am very fond of Paul, and I should not like to see him unhappy. However, I hope I was mistaken, since it displeases you so much, my dear child.’

‘ Don’t be so dreadfully humble, mamma,’ said Margaret laughing. ‘ I was very rude to you—but I can’t bear your inventing lovers for me, which you are so fond of doing.’

CHAPTER XVI.

A DANGEROUS PATH.

WHEN Horace returned to Princes Gate, he found Mrs Morant alone in her own sitting-room ; she had thrown off her bonnet, and was resting on a sofa, cold and pale, and in an attitude of absolute dejection, her head resting on her hand. She scarcely looked up as he came into the room, and no glad smile of welcome greeted him. Horace sat down beside her ; he was much agitated, and taking her disengaged hand in his, he said, with more tenderness than he had yet ventured to express to her—‘ You have bad news—tell me, dear ; don’t keep it from me.’ Catherine burst into tears, and it was only by degrees that she

was calm enough to explain how little comfort her visit had brought her. She could not tell Horace that his name had been mentioned by Admiral Morant as her lover; but he soon divined all that she could not explain.

An anguish of sympathy and of affection possessed his whole being.

‘Let me help you, Catherine,’ he whispered. ‘Let me protect and take care of you. You do not know how devotedly I love you. I love you with my whole soul;’ and he passionately kissed her hand as he spoke.

Mrs Morant was not surprised as he said these words. Perhaps she was not wholly unprepared for them, but they only seemed to fill up the full measure of her miserable position.

‘Don’t you know it would kill my mother?’ she answered drearily. ‘You are as cruel as the rest—you have no esteem for me. Pray

leave me. You have given the last touch to all the dreadful humiliations of this day.'

'No esteem !' Horace said ; 'you are unjust, Mrs Morant.' He stood before her pale and trembling with emotion. 'I would give my life for you,' he continued ; 'yet I only add to your pain. Forgive me, before I go—I will not offend you again.' But he returned to his place beside her as he added humbly—'I cannot go away from you unforgiven.' And Catherine forgave him.

Horace went home in time only to dress for dinner, intending to return and dine at Princes Gate. The whole 'current of his being' at this moment was set upon Catherine—to make her happy, to prove himself worthy of her trust and of her affection. At the same time he knew well they had now fallen into a dangerous path, in which nothing but the utmost circumspection could keep them both

from sin and misery. They might be exceptional people, Horace persuaded himself, and love each other without falling into worse evil than an unconventional imprudence, which need not make them unhappy, and which, he was resolved, should never disturb Catherine's peace of mind. As he came into his house, Horace found a letter on the hall-table in a stranger's handwriting. He tore it open with a prevision of something painful, and read—

‘SIR,—After mature consideration, I deem it to be my duty towards my nephew, Captain Morant, to write and inform him that your daily visits at Princes Gate are creating remark and anxiety amongst his friends, and that he will do well to put himself in communication with Mrs Morant's family upon the subject.—Yours obediently,

‘AGATHA MORANT.’

Horace had thought himself one of the happiest of men two minutes before he had opened this note. He saw that it was all over now.

‘She expects me to dine; what excuse can I make?’ was his first practical conclusion after reading Miss Morant’s letter; and he wrote at once to Catherine, in as light a tone as he could devise, to avoid causing her any alarm:—

‘I find some business here which must keep me at home to-night. Be a little sorry for me.

à demain, H. O.’

When he had sent this off, he called for a hansom, and drove to Montagu Square. Here he sent in his card, and asked to see Miss Morant. She was alone in the drawing-room. Her brother had the habit of going to sleep after dinner in the dining-room; and Horace found himself face to face with a pale thin little

woman, who was evidently possessed of considerable firmness and energy of purpose, and who received him with an air of uncompromising dislike and distrust.

‘You are Mr Ormonde,’ she said, ‘and you have received my note, I presume?’

‘I have received it,’ Horace replied with coolness, ‘and I have come to you now to ask what you mean by it?’

‘Some intimate friends of ours live almost next door to Lady Wrexmore,’ continued Miss Morant,—‘from them I hear that you call—not only once—but often twice a day at her house. No young man of your age and position is likely to do this for the sake of a paralytic old lady. Your visits are to my niece by marriage, Mrs Kenelm Morant.’

‘And if they are,’ Horace answered defiantly, ‘by what right do you interfere with them? Because your nephew does not do his duty,

are Mrs Morant's friends to fail in their duty to her? Are we not to testify, by every means in our power, the respect and homage which she must inspire wherever she is known?'

'Let us have no nonsense,' Miss Morant replied abruptly, 'but come to the point at once. I have not yet written to my nephew, but I shall do so at once, unless you give me your word as a gentleman that your visits to Mrs Morant cease until her husband returns to take care of her himself.'

Horace had remained standing from the time he first came into the room. His tall and commanding figure, in all the vigour of youth and good looks, was still more conspicuous in contrast with the small, careworn, and elderly little woman who stood before him, stern and erect, waiting for his answer. There was a moment's pause, and then Horace answered coldly—

'My visits may be of some use to Lady

Wrexmore and her daughter As a very old and intimate friend of Lord Wrexmore's, I have been able to help them from time to time. If they consider these neighbourly comments of more importance than any service I can render them, I am ready to withdraw from all further communication with them. But I do not believe they will be influenced by these singularly gratuitous remarks; and, at all events, I should require to ask what their wishes are, before I act so discourteously as to forego the pleasure and privilege of calling upon them for the future.'

'You may be as satirical and sarcastic as you choose, Mr Ormonde,' Miss Morant replied, 'but you cannot lay your hand upon your heart and say,—"There is no cause for anxiety" in your relations with that family.'

'I swear to you that there is no cause for anxiety,' Horace answered; 'I will swear it with my hand upon my heart,' he added 'if

you choose. But you may be right,' he continued, 'in reminding us of the folly and malice there is in the world. I honour and reverence Mrs Morant far too highly to allow her to be made the subject of gossiping remarks, if I can prevent it. But you must allow me to say, it is the neglect of her husband, and not the devotion of her friends, which is really the cause of these observations.'

'The one follows the other,' Miss Morant answered. 'No doubt my nephew has been told—though not by us—things which have made him distrust his wife. He is too just a man to condemn her unheard. He is waiting till he can get leave to return home to judge for himself if she has been to blame or not. He expects to come home to England early in the spring—and may be home sooner than we expect. Do not allow him to see or hear anything which may tend to confirm his suspicions.

You think me a spiteful, heartless old maid, I daresay, but I tell you it was not in ill-will that I wrote as I did to you to-day. I had a visit from Mrs Morant, and I could not believe she was a bad woman when I came to see her. I was sorry for her,' Miss Morant continued, and she broke into tears as she proceeded, 'I wish to save her—if there is yet time.'

'Yet time!' Horace answered scornfully. 'My dear madam, you may be quite satisfied your fears are groundless. But I am sure you must feel, as I do, that it would be cruel to add one moment's pain to all that Mrs Morant already has to bear. Do not let her know that ill-natured remarks have been made. As to warning her that her husband may arrive before long, you could not brighten her life better than by giving her any such hope. Meantime I will think over what you have said, and I promise you that you may trust me.'

He held out his hand with apparent frankness as he spoke. Miss Morant gave him hers, saying with solemnity—

‘I will trust you, Mr Ormonde ; you would be the basest of men, indeed, if you could swear falsely in such a matter as this.’ And Horace left the house.

‘Is this to be the end ? Am I the basest of men ?’ he asked himself as he walked home across the Park. ‘O my Catherine ! I have lied for you, but it was to save you—and I will save you,’ he continued ; ‘ though I die without you, I will leave you. Yes, I swear it to my own soul ;—UNLESS—unless you tell me to remain !’ Horace walked fast, communing with himself, and fighting for moral strength under the light of the silent stars. When he reached home, he said to his servant, ‘I shall go abroad most likely to-morrow night for two or three months.’

CHAPTER XVII.

PARTED.

FOR many hours Horace sat up writing letters, and making arrangements for his sudden departure. Though he had been called to the Bar, his connection with that profession was almost nominal. His avocations were far more literary than legal. He had some fortune of his own, and was independent of work except as an interest and occupation; it was not, therefore, any very serious inconvenience to throw up the few business engagements that he had made. But to break through the charm and interest of his intimacy with Mrs Morant gave him very real pain; and this was not only

for his own loss, but he could not help seeing how much she would miss him, and how dreary her life would be without him. When at last he went to bed, he still made plans for her, and thought over every possible consolation that he could suggest in leaving her. He had no longer any hesitation as to the duty of going away. On this point he was now absolutely resolved. But he dreaded telling Catherine that he must go—and it was in the spirit of a reluctant executioner that he called in the morning at his usual early hour at Princes Gate. Catherine received him with a half embarrassed happiness—a gentle dignity and deprecation in her manner, which touched him all the more, because it was for the first and last time that there could be any such consciousness of sentiment between them. He could scarcely bear to tell her that she must lose his companionship for ever. And when at last he broke it to her,

it was impossible for her to plead that there was no danger in his remaining.

Catherine wept in anguish and despair, and yet to her weak soul, there came a sense of consolation in the knowledge that Horace loved her. Right or wrong though it might be, she knew now that she was the first object in his life ; that it was for her sake that he was about to banish himself from all his habitual pursuits, and to remain away, until he could safely meet her as a friend once more.

At last Horace said he must see Lady Wrexmore. ‘It will save you from having to explain anything.’

‘What can you tell her?’ Catherine asked, in a tone of despair. ‘You do not know how wicked mamma will think me for caring for you as I do.’

‘Is it likely I shall tell her?’ Horace answered reproachfully. ‘Do you think any

human being will ever know that once, for a few moments, you fancied that my attachment for you called for so much pity that you believed it was love? You are mistaken, my child,' he added, resolved to give her all the strength with which he could possibly inspire her. 'I have a strong conviction,' he continued, that Morant will return before long, and explain everything; that you will find he loves you still—and your affection for him will revive stronger than ever. Remember what I say. You will be glad then, that you only felt a little compassion for me. You will be glad that I went away, before it was too late.'

When Horace went into Lady Wrexmore's room to take leave of her, his task of explanation and of farewell was comparatively easy. 'The bitterness of death was past.' He had parted from Catherine—and left her far more miserable and broken-hearted, than when he

had first made her acquaintance, and had imagined that he could help her, and that his friendship would be a comfort and support to her.

When Lady Wrexmore asked him why he was leaving home so abruptly, he entirely silenced all further questioning by explaining, that he had resolved to visit her son at Nice.

‘We can spare you to Edmund with grateful hearts,’ the Dowager said. ‘This is indeed good news;’ and she poured out many messages, and charged Horace with many wistful, motherly anxieties, about which he was to be sure to write her the fullest answers after he had seen her son.

Horace in his turn begged Lady Wrexmore to make some effort for Catherine’s sake. To invite Admiral and Miss Morant to visit her he felt was an essential point to urge; and when he had obtained Lady Wrexmore’s promise that this should be done, and that Lady

Porchester should be induced also to cultivate and propitiate Kenelm's relations, Horace had one other suggestion to make. 'Mrs Morant seems to have so few young people about her,' he said. 'Of course she does not care for general society just now ; but she might see more intimate friends of her own age—do not you agree with me, dear Lady Wrexmore? She leads a very depressing life.'

'I felt it very much before we had you to cheer us,' Lady Wrexmore answered affectionately. 'You are quite right ; Catherine will miss your visits greatly. I will try to remember some of her young friends, and we will persuade her to see something of them again ; but my ill-health and our many anxieties have made this too sad a house to invite any young people here.'

'You do not often see the Aylmers,' Horace continued. 'They are so nearly connected, I

should have expected to find that Miss Aylmer was a friend of Mrs Morant's, but I never met her here. I feel sure they would suit.'

'They call here sometimes,' Lady Wrexmore said. 'Mr Aylmer was here on Saturday. I don't know why you have not met Margaret. I will certainly ask them to dine—for Catherine's sake. For myself, you can well believe, Mr Ormonde, it is only an effort to receive any but my most intimate friends. But you are very good to show so much solicitude on my dear child's account, and I will do all you wish to the best of my power.'

Horace pleased himself with the thought that he had suggested a delightful companion for Catherine, in Margaret Aylmer. Though he knew nothing more of her than the one glimpse he had had of her in the Park, he had been vividly impressed by the sweetness and candour of her expression; and if he had been

free to remain in England, he would himself have persuaded Catherine, he thought, to make a friend of Miss Aylmer.

He had much business to get through during the remainder of the day, and could not get ready to start till the next morning, but he would not trust himself to see Mrs Morant again. He dined alone at his club, and drove home immediately afterwards, thoroughly wearied out both in mind and body. His servant met him with a note from Catherine. 'It was to be given to you directly you came home, the man said.' Horace turned into his study, and shut the door, before he opened the letter, which said—

'You forbade me to write whilst you were abroad, and of course I shall obey you ; but there is still time to ask what is the meaning of your urging mamma to invite Miss Aylmer

[illegible]

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Horace threw himself into an arm-chair, and buried his face in his hands. Nemesis had followed him as unerringly as it pursues us all. When we sow the wind, we shall afterwards reap the whirlwind. For one moment Horace rose up to go off and see Catherine; the next instant his strong masculine good sense prevailed, and he sat down again; and drawing writing materials towards him, he wrote :—

‘I never spoke to Miss Aylmer in my life. I only suggested her because she is one of the connections of your family, and her coming to your house would not disturb Lady Wrexmore so much as any new acquaintance might do. I thought only of what might help and brighten your life; and this young girl, whom I once saw in the Park, looked kind and good. Do not ask me to see you again until I return to England, a few months hence—indeed it is better

not. But do not doubt that, whether far off or near to you, I am always the same.'

At Victoria Station, in the misty early morning, Horace had taken his ticket, and was sorry to find he had still ten minutes to wait before the train started, when his heart seemed to stand still for an instant, as he caught sight of a familiar graceful figure, wrapped in a soft travelling-cloak and closely veiled, pacing up and down the platform.

Of course it was Catherine Morant. As Horace hurried to meet her, he was conscious that a fierce temptation was before him. In her devotion to him, he believed that she was capable of any imprudence. Indeed, why had she come at all, unless to go away with him?

For a moment Horace could not speak; and as he took her hand in his, and gave her his arm, Catherine could feel that his heart was beat-

ing wildly. She was more self-possessed. Her misery in losing him made her quite indifferent to conventionality, but it gave her also the calm of despair.

‘I wished to see you once more,’ she said. ‘I told you so in my letter, and you refused to come. It is the first request I ever made in vain to you, and it hurt me so much that you could bear to go away estranged and misunderstanding me.’

‘Not that—not that, indeed,’ Horace said, and he pressed her hand more closely within his arm, saying, ‘Do you not feel how my heart is beating? Do you not feel that I love you so much that it would be cruelty to keep me by you;—impossible indeed, unless you choose to give up everything for me. There is still time. Will you do this? Dearest Catherine, shall I remain in England—tell me? there is still time.’

Catherine clung more closely to his arm as she answered—

‘We have resolved to part—but I could not bear your cold letter ; I could not bear to think that you were occupied about Miss Aylmer at a time when my heart was breaking, and when I wanted one more kind word, before you go away for ever.’

‘Do you think I can forget you ?’ Horace asked. ‘As for Miss Aylmer, I told you, my dear, I don’t know her ; I never spoke to her. Don’t let us waste time in speaking about her. Catherine, I go away for your sake. If we had done wrong, you would suffer more than you do now. Think of your husband’s return. You will be glad then, that you have acted rightly in sending me away, and that there is no impassable barrier between him and you. God only knows what it costs me to leave you,’ he added hurriedly ; for the bell was now

ringing, and he had to get into the train. 'There is no one here to care or know us,' he said ; and he pushed aside her veil and kissed her as he spoke.

Almost at the next instant, Mr Scudamore ran up to the carriage, where Horace had now taken his seat, saying—

'Here is a small parcel which Lady Wrexmore begs you will give to his Lordship.'

'Mrs Morant has just brought me something else for her brother,' Horace said as an excuse, anxious by all means to screen Catherine ; 'I will take care of everything for him.'

The train started, and Catherine was in an agony of tears, whilst Horace, pale and agitated, waved his hand from the carriage-window, and was swiftly borne away.

If Mr Scudamore had seen that last farewell, Horace knew he could be trusted to keep it secret—except from his wife. Mr Scudamore

believed in wives. He had no children, and he and his wife poured out their hearts to each other about everything and everybody, excepting always such confidences as might be reposed in him professionally. Upon this point he was invulnerable, and his wife entirely accepted his reserve, and approved of it as a part of what she considered his sacred calling as a physician, to which she must submit with due humility of heart. Mr Scudamore was an exceedingly kind-hearted man. He had witnessed Catherine's rash farewell to Horace Ormonde; but he belonged to the charitable of the world, and his first thought was to be glad that it was himself, and not a stranger, who had seen this parting.

When the train was well out of sight, Mr Scudamore gave Catherine his arm, in a matter-of-course way, saying—

‘Shall I put you into a cab, or would you rather walk?’

Catherine made no answer. She was, indeed, still crying too much to speak, and they walked in absolute silence from Victoria Station to Princes Gate.

As they came into the house, Catherine had recovered enough to be able to say, 'Thank you, Mr Scudamore,' in a grateful tone.

He then joined his wife, and had the good sense to omit telling her of the last act of that parting scene, which, with all his charity, had somewhat disturbed his mind.

'Mrs Morant walked home with me, poor thing!' he said. 'She is so impulsive and impetuous, I don't feel sure that she had not her toothbrush in her pocket, when she went off to the train. But Ormonde is a man of admirable good sense and very high moral tone; besides, of course, he told me Mrs Morant came only with a parcel for her brother. But I am afraid she has some romance in her poor little heart about

him. You must be very kind and patient with her, Julia. She will miss Mr Ormonde's visits very much.'

Julia, however, was far more severe than her husband in her condemnation of Catherine. This excellent woman felt a recoil from her, which made it difficult to think of meeting her again with any friendliness, or even of remaining under the same roof with her, after what her husband had said.

'You call her "poor thing!" and say she is so impulsive and impetuous, as if these tendencies are quite beyond our own power to control. If you did your duty, Robert, you would call upon her to repent in dust and ashes for her "romantic notions," as you call them, instead of making jokes, and wondering if she had put her toothbrush in her pocket. There is some spell about this woman which has even infatuated you, I believe.'

Mr Scudamore was obliged to admit that he had spoken too lightly. ‘ You see, she has been so long neglected and deserted by her husband, that one is apt to forget that she is married at all,’ he said apologetically. ‘ If I had left you alone for a year, and never written to you during all that time, nor appeared to care if you were dead or alive, you might become a little flighty too, perhaps, if you were very unhappy.’

‘ Robert !’ his wife answered reproachfully, ‘ I would become a sister of mercy, and try to help others more miserable than myself. You know, at all events, I should never flirt with another man.’

‘ Well, but Mrs Morant does not flirt,’ Robert answered. ‘ Look how quietly she spends her time in her mother’s room day after day. Don’t be severe upon her, my dear, because I made a foolish, ill-judged joke about her. Of course she will miss Mr Ormonde—we shall all do so ;

but if she had wished to flirt with him, she would not have let him go away, or he would not have gone. No ; my impression is, they may have discovered it is a little imprudent to see each other so often, and he very properly decides to go away. Having done the right thing, let us support them in it to the best of our power ; and I expect you to be particularly kind to her, Julia.'

It was a matter of absolute indifference to Mrs Morant whether Julia was 'kind' to her or not. She simply looked on the Scudamores as useful members of the household, who were bound to be faithful and loyal to all the family, and to whom it was not necessary to explain anything. They could see for themselves whatever they cared to know.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEATH IN LIFE.

THE parting was over. Horace was free to wander unquestioned where he chose. He had felt great anxiety, for Catherine's sake, to soften the pain of separation by every means in his power. For this reason he had decided to go to her brother at Nice for the first few days, so that she might feel sure of being spoken of and tenderly considered. He thought this would help her to bear the first week of his absence, and he had promised to write one letter from thence. Afterwards, he had resolved that the only prudent course was absolute silence. Death in life was to be dealt out to her with an unflinching hand—it was his duty. He was

right thoroughly to act up to it ; but he ought to have begun doing so sooner. He had made himself too much a part of Catherine's life to be at liberty to tear up every fibre of his intimacy with her so abruptly. For himself it was the truest wisdom, but for her it was a cruel policy. Absence alone would have been a sharp trial, with every consolation that friendly letters could have brought to her ; but a blank silence was more than Catherine could long endure—tried as she had already been by the same course of action from her husband. She had promised to obey Horace's decision, and not to write to him. In the hurry of his departure she had scarcely realised how terrible this would be to her.

Horace felt a sharp pang when he awoke the next morning at Paris, and remembered that he could not even have a little note, such as he had received so often of late, from her. There

was no longer before him the one sweet everyday duty, as he had accustomed himself to consider it, of sympathising with Catherine, of consoling and making her happy. As he thought of her forlorn position without him, all the sensibility of his nature was stirred within him ; and yet there came also a strange sense of elation as he reflected that she was safe under her mother's roof, and that he had found strength to leave her. So much of his affection for her had sprung from pity, that when he was once removed from the fascination of her presence, he could think of her once more as of a suffering child, for whose ultimate good he was sacrificing himself. He was no longer oppressed by fears and vague remorse, his 'conscience, as the noon-day clear,' approved his course of action. He was impatient to break the last links of the chain which still bound him—to get over his visit to Lord Wrexmore with-

out delay, and then to roam about the world at large.

On his arrival at Nice, Horace drove at once to the Wrexmores' house, which was near the Promenade des Anglais, facing the ever-dazzling sparkle of the blue Mediterranean. He found his old friend, Edmund, resting amongst orange-trees and myrtles, in a sheltered corner of the broad stone terrace, upon which the drawing-room windows opened. His wife was with him, and as Horace Ormonde was announced, they both came forward and received him with radiant cordiality.

Lady Wrexmore's countenance beamed with animation and good-humour, as she said, in her clear cheerful tone, 'Does not Edmund do me great credit, Mr Ormonde? Is not he looking wonderfully better?'

Horace answered, 'Yes, indeed, he is,' at the first moment; for Lord Wrexmore's face was lit

up with the immense joy of seeing his old friend again, and Horace did not at first perceive that he was weaker, and more decidedly an invalid than when he had seen him last—more than a year before.

‘I am so glad you are satisfied,’ Marion said. ‘Was not I right to insist on keeping him quietly here, instead of letting him travel all over Europe, Africa, and Asia, as he wanted to do, to enlarge his mind? All he really required was rest and quiet, and that he has had, driving from one sunny resting-place to another in the Corniche. It is a charming country. I delight in it, and so does he,’ she added, smiling affectionately at her husband.

‘Marion, my dear, it was not for my own health’s sake only that I wished to travel, nor to enlarge my mind. It was to help poor Catherine,’ he said, and his voice changed as he spoke. ‘I would give anything to

be well enough to go and seek out that ruffian, Morant.'

'Don't excite yourself about him,' Marion said lightly. 'He is eccentric, no doubt ; but I daresay it will all come right in time. Don't you think so, Mr Ormonde? Is there any news of the monster?' she added laughing. 'What a strange creature he must be! And yet, at our united marriage—you know, of course, we were all married together with one service, it was so indeed—I thought I never saw a more commonplace little man.'

'*Little?*' Ormonde asked, with a stirring of curiosity ; he had never heard any personal description of Captain Morant.

'Yes, rather short—about Catherine's own height, which is indeed *very* short for a man. He was not particularly good-looking ; he was not particularly agreeable ; he was not very polished ; altogether, it is difficult to know why our poor

little Catherine fell so desperately in love with him. Indeed, you and your mother were both under the spell,' Marion continued in her sprightly tone. 'When I arrived at Wrexmore, Mr Ormonde, they were all absolutely infatuated by this stupid Kenelm Morant. Edmund was just as bad as the rest. He was "such a brave, honest, open-hearted sailor—so modest about all his achievements—so true—so kind."'

'Ah! leave off, Marion, my dear love,' Lord Wrexmore now interposed. 'It is too painful, too real a tragedy, to discuss in this manner. We were all cruelly deceived. I never knew a more taking fellow,—indeed, nothing but madness can explain his conduct now. How is Catherine?' he continued, turning to his friend Ormonde, 'tell me about her,'

Of course Horace, as a man of the world, was able to talk about Mrs Morant in the calm tone of a trusted friend. He betrayed no

painful embarrassment ; but it was a relief to him when Marion asked—

‘Do you care for babies ? I shall send for your godchild.’

Horace had almost forgotten that Lord Wrexmore had a son and heir, to whom he had been made godfather by proxy, only three months since. When Horace saw how much happiness and sunshine had come into his friend’s life by his marriage, he sighed as he reflected how little prospect there was of any such fate awaiting him.

Lady Wrexmore’s rule of life was cheerfulness under all circumstances. She had excellent health, no nerves, and no heart. But she had good-nature and a perfect temper, which took the place of higher qualities, and threw a beneficent veil over the innate selfishness of her character. Horace had heard of her as a mere woman of the world, and was completely

reassured by the glamour of amiability which she threw around her. In the midst of much regret and much wistful anxiety about Catherine, there came a certain sense of relief in his freedom. He was surprised to find that he could still be amused and gay—that he could enjoy life once more. Horace felt as if he had fired off his pistols into the air, after keeping them loaded with pain and anxiety for so many months past. The Wrexmores had arranged a bedroom and sitting-room in their own house for his especial use; and, with his ready powers of adaptation, he was at once at home and at his ease with his friend Edmund and his wife. The day after he arrived at Nice, he was called upon to take a long country walk with Marion, whilst Lord Wrexmore drove out with the nurse and the baby.

‘I am so glad to have a companion in my constitutional walk,’ Marion said with her

bright smile, as they set off together. 'Hitherto I have walked alone. On principle I take all the air and exercise I can, so as to keep strong and well for Edmund. I dine out also, and go to all the balls for an hour or two, just long enough to be able to bring back a little gossip to amuse him with. I am sure it is the best thing to do. He has the doctor, you know, to fall back upon when I am out; and I come back to him like a fresh visitor, and amuse him a great deal more than if I stayed at home every evening with him. Your arrival is an immense resource for him. I hope you are not going to hurry away.'

'In a week, I am afraid,' Horace answered; but Marion strongly opposed this idea, and at once extracted a promise of at least a fortnight's visit. Horace had so much real sympathy with Lord Wrexmore, and he found his time pass so pleasantly at Nice, that he was easily

persuaded to put off his Eastern tour, and to remain as long as he could be of use to his friend. He had intended jealously to have guarded the secret of his attachment, and it was easy to do so with Edmund, who was not prone to occupy himself with the affairs of others ; but the third day of his arrival at Nice, a letter addressed to him in Catherine's hand was given to him by Lady Wrexmore, who said kindly, ' I ought to have warned you, Mr Ormonde, all the letters for this house come to us directly from the post-office ; we have our own bag, and send a messenger for it—it saves delay. I keep the key, and every letter comes under my own eyes. If you do not like this arrangement, just write a line to the post-office, and you can have your own letters in any other way you like. *Poste Restante*, if you prefer it.'

Horace was a good deal annoyed, but he answered quietly, ' Mrs Morant is anxious

for news of her brother,' as he glanced hastily at the letter and put it into his pocket. The next moment he regretted that he had said anything at all, but he had been thrown off his guard. Catherine had broken her promise, and she wrote simply to tell Horace that she could not abide by it.

'You asked me an impossibility,' she said, 'when you told me not to write to you. I cannot endure this terrible silence. Four days have passed since you left England, and not one word has come from you. Mamma is very anxious to hear about Edmund ; and if I do not write before you leave him, I shall not know where to send a letter to you. The experience of these few days is enough to prove to me that I must claim the right to correspond with you ; and I beg you to withdraw your objection, and absolve me from my promise. Indeed, as you see, I am not able to keep it.'

There was no signature to Catherine's letter. They had, for many weeks past, arrived at a stage of intimacy in which they could find no name by which to address each other, and in which their notes and letters had no beginning and no ending. And yet, until the last few days before Horace left England, he had been able to persuade himself that it was he alone who suffered—he alone to whom there was any danger in the undefined depth and meaning of every word and action of their life.

CHAPTER XIX.

A KNIGHT-ERRANT.

PAUL OGLEBY could see with painful clearness that Margaret cared for him with nothing but a sisterly regard. They were so intimate, that it was only by constant effort that he could repress the declaration of his own love for her. Upon every other subject it was his custom to consult her, to discuss everything with her. Paul's only consolation, his only hope, lay in the reflection that, as yet, Margaret cared for no one else—that there was no one else in his way. He was the dearest friend she had in the world, and as long as he could hold this position he was consoled. Now and then he gave way to a petulant speech—to a

rebellious irritation with her for her coolness and her quiet friendliness ; but he knew if he once betrayed that he was in love with her, it would be like the boy in the fairy tale who killed the golden goose. Of course Margaret saw, by these fitful flashes, that Paul was capable of what is called 'making a fool of himself' about her. She did not yet understand what such a state of feeling meant, and expected to keep him as her friend through life : if he did not betray any deeper affection for her, she concluded that he was happy and satisfied, as she was herself. Margaret believed that the fanaticism with which Paul threw himself into his benevolent schemes for improving the condition of working-men, was the one real enthusiasm of his life, and that the sentiment which he now and then betrayed for her, was the mere foolish offshoot of a romantic temperament, which she was bound firmly to

discourage, since she could certainly feel no sympathy with it.

Paul was a self-reliant, energetic man with the rest of the world, but with Margaret he was full of humility. Whenever he had offended her, he appeared before her with the air of a criminal, seeking a reconciliation by every means in his power. Margaret could not endure these humble moods of his, and would lash him into self-assertion once more by a playful severity, which drove him back into the beaten road of friendship, on which she could meet him with honest cordiality.

Lady Wrexmore kept her promise to Horace Ormonde, and soon after he left England, the Aylmers were invited to dine at Princes Gate. Paul and Lavinia Ogleby were asked for the same day, with their father. Margaret looked forward with much interest to this dinner. She was only fifteen when her half-sister Marion

had been first engaged to Lord Wrexmore. Since that time she had very seldom seen any of the family. Illness and death at Wrexmore Hall, during the following two years, had prevented any visits there, until the double wedding had taken place, now a year ago, when Margaret had been bridesmaid to her sister. She had admired Mrs Morant very much at that time, and felt much attracted by her; but since her unhappiness about her husband had begun, Catherine had never called anywhere, and never was 'at home' to any but a very few people, amongst whom Margaret had not been included. Mr and Mrs Aylmer often went to see the Dowager in her own private-room, where she daily received one or two chosen friends, but Margaret had never been invited to the house since she came out. As she drove there with her father and mother on this occasion, she sat quite silent, thinking over Cathe-

rine's sad history, and filled with the tenderest sympathy and compassion for her.

Mr Aylmer had an official appointment in Downing Street, and was a valuable man of business ; he was also well read, and fond of literature. He had always lived in good society, and there was a genial urbanity in his manner, which made him universally popular. Sometimes, however, in the confidence of his own family, it must be owned that his quaint sayings, and what he intended for grave humour, became rather wearisome and out of taste,—so that Margaret, with all her filial affection, was obliged, now and then, to confess to herself that she wished her father would talk a little less, and even that he would be a little less perpetually cheerful. This evening, especially, Mr Aylmer's conversation in the carriage jarred against Margaret's more sensitive feelings. He was speculating upon the

evening that was before them. 'It will not be very lively,' he said. 'We shall find the Oglebys, no doubt, and Moncrieffe, the dear Dowager's chaplain and father confessor, of course, will be there.'

'Does she confess?' asked Margaret, rather aghast at such a suggestion.

'I should think so,' her father answered laughingly. 'She is the kind of woman who finds consolation in that sort of thing, and Moncrieffe is the sort of man to encourage it; but I know nothing about it.'

'I am sure,' said Mrs Aylmer in her timid voice, 'if confession is any comfort to a suffering, bereaved, bedridden woman, who bears all her trials with the most angelic patience, but who must want every spiritual support she can obtain, it would be cruel to blame her for it. What is the harm of confession, after all? I often regret it is not more usually the custom

in our Church ; it is approved and allowed, you know, in the Rubric. I have often told you, Henry, it is the one thing which most attracts me in the Romish Church.'

'Don't let me catch your director lurking about in my house,' answered Mr Aylmer good-humouredly, 'if you mean to set one up. I should kick him out neck-and-crop the first time he darkened my doors, I warn you, my dear. If you want to confess, come to me ; I am your lawful adviser and protector. I will promise you absolution, you stupid old darling!' he added, and he shook her by the hand as he spoke.

'My dear,' Mrs Aylmer said, 'you are always very good and kind, but you are very easily bored, you must admit ; and really there are often very serious questions arising in my life, in which I feel the want of an accredited adviser.'

'The deuce you do !' Mr Aylmer said rather

crossly ; ‘ then I can only say the sooner you cure yourself of this spiritual craving the better.’

Mrs Aylmer was a little hurt, and thought her dear Henry unsympathising ; and Margaret was silent, feeling that she ought not to interfere. But Mr Aylmer was essentially a good-natured man, and consequently was the least bit in the world snubbed by his family ; and after a moment’s pause, he thought it prudent to give a turn to the conversation by saying, ‘ Margaret, we must all of us be very careful what we talk about at dinner to-day. We can’t refer to the navy, shipwrecks, nor any kind of disasters at sea—nor to husbands nor captains—nor *madness* particularly ; for, after all, that is the solution of the whole mystery, but the Wrexmores are all so dire obstinate, they won’t believe it. Furthermore, be sure you avoid any reference to Greek history.’

‘ That I don’t understand,’ Margaret said

gravely ; ‘ though I am not very anxious to do so : it seems to me such a very grim kind of joke, dear papa. I am sure, I feel at this moment only as if I were going to a funeral.’

‘ But, my dear, you will be expected to talk. Even at a funeral people talk in a subdued kind of way ; but still they talk, if it is only about the weather, or the fit of their horrid, stiff, black gloves. But as to avoiding particular topics ; I mentioned Greek history, because *Sappho* is the name of Captain Morant’s ship ; and Sappho, as you know, was an eminent Greek poetess. She invented that kind of verse which is called after her name, the “ Sapphic.” In the “ Spectator ”—not the newspaper, but the old Addison “ Spectator ”—you will find a character of the poetess and a translation, both in French and English, of two of her fragments. I can remember how it begins,’ Mr Aylmer went on—

“Heureux ! qui près de toi, pour toi seule soupire ;
Qui jouit du plaisir de t’entendre parler :
Qui te voit quelque-fois doucement lui sourire.
Les dieux, dans son bonheur, peuvent-ils l’égalé ?”

The English translation is not so good, in my opinion, but it is more literal ; it begins—

“Blest as th’ immortal gods is he,
The youth who fondly sits by thee ;
And hears and sees thee all the while
Softly speak and sweetly smile.”

But here we are at Princes Gate,’ Mr Aylmer continued. ‘Now, Margaret ! remember to avoid husbands, navy, madness, Sappho’——

‘Please don’t go on, papa,’ answered Margaret ; and they all went into the house.

The Dowager always received her guests at the dinner-table on these occasions ; she preferred to be quietly carried downstairs under Mr Scudamore’s supervision ; and when Margaret arrived with her father and mother, there was only the admirable Julia in the drawing-room.

‘Mrs Morant will be down immediately,’

Mrs Scudamore said ; ' she is usually a little late—you will excuse her I am sure.'

' How is Mrs Morant ?' asked Mrs Aylmer kindly.

' Oh ! she is very, very low just now,' Mrs Scudamore replied,—' she is really scarcely equal to receiving her friends ; but of course I do all I can to spare her, and we hope the little distraction may be good for her.'

Mrs Scudamore rather enjoyed the importance of moving, at all events, in the side scenes, of a real mystery, and Margaret felt indignant at the foolish suggestion that a dinner-party could distract the mind of a wife who mourned over the unexplained alienation of a beloved husband. The dinner was announced before Mrs Morant appeared, and after shaking hands with Mrs Aylmer, she merely bowed with her sweet sad smile to Margaret and Lavinia, and desired Sir Philip to take Mrs Aylmer down to dinner.

There was only one guest late, the clergyman who was Lady Wrexmore's chaplain.

'We are too many ladies,' Catherine said as she declined Paul's offered arm.

'I will take care of Mrs Morant,' Julia cried, pressing forward with her usual fussiness, but Catherine swept past her without taking any notice of her anxious civility. One thought only was in her mind. Horace had said Margaret Aylmer 'looked kind and good.' It was some months since Catherine had seen her, and as they came into the brilliant light of the dining-room, Mrs Morant looked only at Margaret.

'How beautiful she is!' Catherine thought; 'and yet he did not say he thought so. He only ventured to tell me she "looked kind and good." Oh! what cowards men are! He could not face the pain of telling me that he admired her, and yet I would rather a thousand

times he told the truth, than have to find it out for myself.'

Margaret meantime was feeling the deepest compassion for Mrs Morant. 'She is very much altered,' she told Paul in a low voice, as he sat next her; 'but her face is more interesting than it ever was. I used to think she was like Undine, and now the likeness is more striking than before;—she has found her soul.'

Paul demurred. 'She does not give me that impression,' he said. 'She looks as if she were in a transition state, hovering between God and the devil.'

'Not in the least,' Margaret answered warmly. 'You are horribly uncharitable. I think she looks like an angel of patience and sweetness.'

'I am sorry for her,' Paul replied, 'but I am afraid she is not quite an angel yet. She looks much more like a *femme incomprise*.'

'I never know what that means,' Margaret

answered, 'and I hate French phrases ; they don't suit you in the least, Paul, and you have become extremely affected this evening.'

'Have I?' Paul answered with gravity ; and after a moment's pause he added, carefully lowering his voice, 'It is only because I don't want you to become a great friend of the lady we were speaking about. From what Lavinia has told me, I fancy she is no longer very much occupied about her husband ; and though I am very sorry for her, and would do anything to help her myself, I can't think her a good companion for any very young girl.'

Margaret coloured with indignation, and was silent for an instant, then the clear sapphire eyes flashed full upon him, as she said, 'You had better prove you will do anything to help her by some good action, instead of maligning her to me—trampling on those who are down. You have not the least right to interfere, even

if she had committed a murder ; and I shall certainly see as much of her as I possibly can, however little you may approve of it.'

Paul was deeply hurt. 'Has friendship no rights?' he asked ; but Margaret did not answer.

Catherine was sitting at the other end of the table ; and although, with her innate courtesy, she carried on a desultory conversation with Sir Philip Ogleby, she was continually observing Margaret ; and when she saw that she was evidently intimate enough with Paul to talk with serious earnestness to him, a sigh of relief escaped her. 'They must be engaged, or very near it,' she said to herself ; 'and perhaps, when everybody returns to England, they will be already married ; and I need not care if he says again that she looks "kind and good."'

Paul was eminently good-looking, without being handsome. His features were somewhat flat and square, but his hair was absolutely

black ; his eyes were also black, large, and luminous, with thick black eyelashes and clearly defined eyebrows. His teeth were faultless. His closely-shaven face, with its clear olive complexion, bore a frankness of expression which was very attractive ; and his figure, though slight, was firm, well set, and upright. During the evening Mrs Aylmer sat beside Lady Wrexmore's sofa, and Lavinia played magnificently, which relieved the monotony of the party. Margaret talked a little to Mrs Morant in the intervals of the music ; Catherine's plaintive voice, her sweet sad smile, and her absent manner, interested her much.

‘ Have you heard to-day from Nice ? ’ Margaret asked. ‘ Marion wrote to us this week a better account. Mr Ormonde seems to be of so much use to them ; she says Wrexmore is in much better spirits since he has arrived.’

Catherine looked fixedly at Margaret's guile-

less countenance for an instant before she replied, then she said steadily, 'Do you know Mr Ormonde?'

'No,' Margaret answered lightly; 'I never even saw him, that I know of. But, I believe, he did me a service once in the Park, and stopped my horse when I was run away with. However, Paul was there almost at the same moment, so I will divide my gratitude,' said she with a relenting smile, turning to Paul, who stood near them.

'When was this accident?—how long ago?' Catherine asked; 'it is very odd I never heard of it.'

'Oh! it was not an accident, there was nothing in it to interest any one. I am not much used to riding, and Sir Philip had lent me a horse that I had never ridden before. I believe I was nervous.'

'You did not betray it, if you were,' Paul

said ; 'you never once lost your presence of mind.'

'Yes, I did ; otherwise I should certainly have taken some notice of my preserver, Mr Ormonde, whom I have been wishing to know for this last year or two, but you would never introduce him to us,' she continued playfully, and still addressing Paul.

'It would not be difficult for you to know him when he is in London,' Paul answered ; 'but I have not seen him about much, of late. He has avoided his old friends for many months past.'

Here Catherine interposed, with a tone of dignity which disarmed Paul's severity, as she said, 'Mr Ormonde has been very kind to *us*, all this time, Mr Ogleby ; we have seen him a great deal. I don't think it is quite fair to give him the character of neglecting his old friends. He has not neglected us, and he is with Wrexmore now, as you know, abroad.'

Catherine said these words with the instinct of self-preservation. She had easily detected that Paul disapproved, although he pitied her ; and she knew that from Lavinia he must have heard that there had been something more than commonplace friendship between Horace Ormonde and herself. She knew Paul's chivalry of nature, and felt sure he would stand by her if she could only let him see that she trusted him. After all, though she had been weak, she had chosen the right path. She had agreed to give up the only consolation of her life, cost what it might. She had not lost all right to self-respect, and she felt this as her support when she defended Horace Ormonde.

'*Les absens ont toujours tort,*' Paul said in answer to Catherine, with a frank look of regret ; and as he spoke he saw that Margaret also forgave him, although he had quoted French again.

That night, in the solitude of his own room,

You said I ought to prove my readiness to help, instead of making empty professions.

‘I have always had an idea that the missionary curate, Mr Orde, who went as far as Gibraltar with Captain Morant, might be able to throw some light on his strange conduct, if we could only get at him. I mean to find out if he has any correspondents in England, and if anything has transpired in his letters worth investigating further. I am sorry I spoke with so little sympathy of one who is already unhappy enough, and whom I will henceforward do all in my power to help and befriend by word and deed. I promise you this. Of course, if I have to go off to Zanzibar, or wherever Orde may be, I shall come to see you first. But, for the present, I shall make what inquiries I can in England.—Yours ever, PAUL OGLEBY.’

END OF VOL. I.

some light on the change which had passed over his friend, from the time they had parted from each other at Gibraltar. But whenever Paul had made this suggestion to his father or Lavinia, they had always answered that it was impossible to communicate with Mr Orde. No one knew where he was. He had no near relations, and no correspondents in England. Mr Freeman, his former rector, was the authority for this last assertion ; but Paul considered that it had been too easily accepted. Catherine's few words in defence of Mr Ormonde had convinced Paul that he had misjudged her. He hated himself for having thrown a stone at her, although it had only rebounded on himself, and done no harm to any one else. At daybreak, Paul was writing to Miss Aylmer—

‘DEAR MARGARET,—I have thought over your words in answer to my ungenerous attack at dinner yesterday upon our unfortunate friend.



